



Set your mind on God's Kingdom and his justice before everything else ...
Matthew 6:33



Everybody is a Templer...

...some of us just don't know it yet

A collection of my Templer Saal – Services held
in Bayswater, Bentleigh and Boronia
over the ten year periods from 1996 to 2006.

Alfred Klink
December 2006

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FOUNDER'S DAY SERVICE, SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER 1996

Templer Community Hall Bayswater

Musical introduction Veronica Rudowicz & Anne Coleman

Welcome to today's Service. It is my privilege to speak to you on this Founder's Day occasion. I am Alfred Klink, and those of you who are aware of my many limitations know that public speaking does not come easy to me. But having reached the age of three score and something years gives one a certain advantage, people tend to make allowances for your age. I thank you in advance for that.

In our Jahreskalender we select certain days as Holidays, as Remembrance days, as Festivals and as days of Celebration. That gives us a chance to reflect on past achievements, to consider current commitments and to look forward to tomorrow. It invites us to think, outside of our daily duties and makes us aware of the social and spiritual environment that supports us.

Today, on this day, we dedicate the Service to the Founders of the Temple Society. To the people who created the spiritual environment out of which we grew. I remember when the day used to be called Hoffmann's Gedenktag. We honour our founders and we reflect on their life, and on the task they dedicated it to.

To begin let us sing two verses from our Templer Hymn, "Trachtet ruft ...", number one in the little green Handbook. I have selected verses 1 and 2 for the start of the Service. 6 and 9 at the End. Feel free to sing in either German or English, and please remain seated.

Veronica Rudowicz

The story of Christoph Hoffmann has been told many times. How, from a background of conservative pietism, he evolved to an intellectual idealist, and then into the pragmatic realist we know from historic accounts. From the idealist of the above hymn, which he composed in 1855, the idealist who saw the salvation of mankind in the preparation of Jerusalem for the return of Jesus Christ, to the realist that saw the Templer's future in good education and scientific awareness. When he died in 1885, at the age of 70, he left a Society struggling against the odds, to establish itself, in a rapidly evolving commercial environment, on a sustainable basis. But beyond that he left us a legacy of ideals that are as fresh today as the day when, in his youth, they inspired him.

I emphasise this point, as I feel Christoph Hoffmann, in his later period involved himself too much in the organisation and the financial affairs of his project, to have retained his idealistic convictions. Perhaps he had no choice. Perhaps in the cruel circumstances of the Middle East environment, the fight to keep his people together, the battle for subsistence became the motivating force. By their very definitions, ideals and practicalities are mutually exclusive. One is a vision of what could be, the other a struggle with what is. The form, the structure so necessary

for stable government, chokes idealism, like a wire cage reduces a songbird's winged prayer to a smelly, mechanical, music box. Sadly the processes involved in making an idea become reality, inevitably forces us to become practical. The Idealist must learn to adapt, and to compromise, to negotiate and to barter. By considering practicalities, very soon, what was in the mind of the beholder a winged gazelle becomes a clay-footed turtle. A soaring cathedral turns out a high-rise office block. The graceful arch of a bridge, flying over an estuary, finishes up as a dark tunnel under the river. An idyllic poem is forged into an instruction manual.

So it came. Ideas turned gradually into guidelines, then rules, then regulations and finally laws. The vision of a world wide Templar movement became an embattled community of farmers and tradesmen, fighting the elements for a meagre existence. The cold reality of an idea demands sacrifices. When you build something, write something, compose something, at some stage of creation you have to say: There it is, finish, that's it. It now has a form of its own, it is yesterday's thoughts set in stone. If you do not let go, if you can not rise above it, time will pass you by.

Perhaps social awareness, and scientific evolution, even then had bypassed the visualised "God's Kingdom" in Jerusalem. The apocalyptic demise of the secular world had not eventuated, and the reality of preparing Jerusalem for the imminent return of Jesus became a search for a practical way for people to live together.

Still, we have to ask, what was it that made Christoph Hoffmann's work last and endure to this day. There have been many other schemes to form religious organisations, that have quickly disappeared again in the equalizing forces of everyday life. And that number includes the substantial efforts that went into creating the Korntal project by Christoph Hoffmann's father, Gottlieb Wilhelm Hoffmann. I have no doubt in my mind that if Christoph Hoffmann, with his followers, had stayed in Kirschenhardthof, the Society would not have lasted any longer than the Korntal project did. It too would have disappeared under the waves of officialdom.

He didn't. Christoph Hoffmann had an inspiration, he tied his idea to a challenging and motivating, practical goal: - To create a settlement in Palestine! The Kingdom of God had to be in Jerusalem. It was such a visionary step that people, well off and with comfortable and secure lifestyles, packed up their beds and followed him. Even Mennonites already settled in Russia joined the group. Whether this vision of a new Jerusalem was Hoffmann's free choice or whether it was in part forced on him by his conflicts with church and state authorities at the time, does not diminish the magnitude of the decision.

He and GD Hardegg worked tireless and determined, planting the project on a resource-solid foundation. Hoffmann exchanged his idealism for security. For stability reason he restricted growth of the Society to growth from within, established rules and regulations that enclosed the Society in a protective shell. A Great Wall of China. And like with the great wall of China it is difficult to decide whether its

purpose was to protect against invasion from outside or to keep people in. So the Temple Society did endure, to this day, through many adversities, isolated by its very own design that kept it intact. It is like a rare plant, that people come to admire and to study. It never flowers, does not produce any seeds, but is a perfect specimen of survival as it continuously adapts to any given environment.

If I had to name one philosophy that motivated me more than any other during my lifetime, it would be the conviction that the world starts now, this moment, and at every new moment still to come. It starts again with every baby that is born, and with every seed that sprouts into the life-giving sunlight. With every new day and yes, with every new thought. It's like the game of chance, or the laws of probability: History does - not - count. It is a human weakness that makes us think every effect must have a distinct cause. A fallacy, like gravity. Or that every cause will result in a definable effect. We have problems imagining a world that started for no reason at all. That's why they invented the Big Bang for the Universe. Deep down we need to feel that someone, somewhere pushes a button, or opens a gate. The sequential nature of events in everyday life makes us forget we could never fully understand the past without physically recreating it in total. Environment and all! You cannot judge or justify the past in the light of today's technical and sociological awareness.

I am a product of the Temple Society history. I am neither criticising nor judging the past. I am admiring the courage and the social fortitude that motivated our founders. Our vision of the past is just as blurred as is that of our future. Just as biased and just as ideologically motivated. How we see and interpret any historic account depends very much on present circumstances and on your own frame of mind. There is no universally accepted, single account of history. There are as many versions of history as there are people living on this planet today. Even here in this room, even with our common background and shared experiences we would be hard-pressed to find two people that agree beyond general principles.

What I am saying is, that whatever the past, that created us was, it has served its purpose, and it is now up to us to shape the future we would like to see coming. Just as if the world was created today. Christoph Hoffmann's practical ideas cannot be transplanted 'a mass' into the twenty first century. They were shaped by an environment totally foreign to our present lifestyle. If we provide retirement homes for the elderly today, it is not because they need it from us physically. The State would do it for those who are financially disadvantaged. If we decide to provide schooling for our youths, it is not because they would remain illiterate otherwise. Today we do it because we want to cultivate ideological ties with people, ours and others; people who by conscious choice can take part in our cultural atmosphere in a productive way. It is up to us to distil the essence of Hoffmann's thoughts out of history and leave behind the many customs, rules and regulations that were time and environment bound. We have to create the conditions, the fresh potting mix, where the original vision transplanted, can again flourish.

The "farview" of Christoph Hoffmann's vision allows the Templer Belief to re-

flect man's progress and achievements. Our religious belief is not founded on the past, not even on what is, nor on dogmas, but on what can be, on the work ahead of us, on the Kingdom as we see it. A World for Life, as it should be, as envisaged by mankind throughout its turbulent history. Our Society does not have a dogmatic creed. Our credibility therefore has to stand the scrutiny of the sceptics, including on fundamental concepts such as faith and the nature of God. Templers cannot afford the luxury of make-believe, even when based on the solid foundation of Christianity. It is our heritage's heavy burden to continuously acknowledge an evolving environment, social and technological, of which we are an interactive part.

It is our burden, but at the same time our strength. To the Templer philosophy it is immaterial whether Jesus was a man or a God. Already Christoph Hoffmann in his book 'Occident and Orient' said "... even if Jesus were an idealised, fictitious character it would not alter the fact that this ideal, and the way to its realisation as demonstrated by the Christ of the Gospels, meets a profound human need and shows us the goal we must strive towards, and the way to attain it."

Therein do I see the enduring quality of the Hoffmann philosophy: To recognise the '... profound human need' to believe in something; - the need to see this belief strengthened by example, by action. This momentous statement of Hoffmann carries religious significance beyond what he did express in words. If the reality of the man Jesus is an expression of our human needs, what about God? Could the reality of God itself, the vision of Him each of us carries deep within us, also be an expression of our human needs? That God, which science today is so hard pressed to find a home for! The God who was displaced from the Greek mountain tops, to the clouds of medieval mythology, from the clouds to the stars of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy', and now, by public sentiment beyond the edge of the Universe and the Big Bang that created it! The only place left, the one place we can with certainty seek Him, is within our mind and our hearts. Have we come full circle to the biblical question: 'Surely you know that you are God's Temple, the temple where the Spirit of God dwells?

The Temple of God is holy, and that temple you are'. So it is said in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, one of the three references in the Bible to man as the temple of God, and Hoffmann's foundation for the definition 'Temple Society'. Hoffmann saw the true reality of Jesus - and I say possibly of God himself - tied to man and to Life, finding its expression in life and through life. I heard the other day an interview with a science professor at Trinity college who, when questioned how he came to study physics, answered: "I wanted to become a priest, so I studied theology for four years; but then thought there must be a way I can apply all this learning and still be a normal man. So I chose the subject that most resembles religion, and that to me is physics. In physics I can explore the Universe, re-live Genesis, I can search how man fits into Nature, and marvel at the wonders of creation. It deals with the fundamental questions of our existence, very much the way religion does. And I have never looked back since."

That reminded me that religion was the very first science. It was all-encom-

passing. It accumulated what the best minds had to offer. It was passed from generation to generation; it was both law and philosophy at the same time. It included the creation of the world and the wisdom of Solomon. It was the sum total of all of man-kinds knowledge. All other branches of human study, such as astronomy, physics, medicine, agriculture and psychology are just extensions of this original motivation, the philosophy, the love for wisdom for greater understanding of our position in this world.

Only in the 17th century, when learning started to become a public domain, did teaching specialise into the separate branches of Priesthood and Natural Sciences. (It is still called *Naturwissenschaften* in German) Copernicus, who started the era of modern science with his heliocentric world, was a monk.

The deep relationship between religion and science was well known to Hoffmann. This fact appears several times in his writings: Religion must be seen in the light of scientific awareness to make it believable. A Religion which does not consider the practical side of life - or a religion that does not help with our problems in everyday life, a religion that is irrelevant to the majority of people, such a religion is not a true religion.

In our technological time, when lifestyles change within decades or less, religions have a hard time remaining in touch with everyday life. Even in the lifetime of Hoffmann, the prophesied, apocalyptic end to the material world, became an empty threat. Scientific education of the public made those religions that insisted on so called revealed truths, bastions for people opposing all progress. There is great danger in having too great an importance placed on guidelines, or to enforce religious conformity. Soon the guidelines themselves assume the meaning of that religion, and its dogmas become the essence of faith. Then Religion is believed for its own sake, for its structure, rather than the objective which it was supposed to support.

To me the word religion symbolises a level of communication between people where discussion is possible above petty disputes and narrow minded dogmatics. Where people can be united in their discussions on humanitarian and universal questions. Where they can talk about God and the world the way each one sees it. Where I can talk to you as I am talking to you now. Where God is Life, where all the world, yes all the universe, is God's domain. Religion is the means to an end, not the end itself. It is an aid for life in human communities, for social harmony and progress. Modern science has taught us that the true challenges to life on this Earth are not the petty disputes we have with our neighbour, nor the colour, race, creed or disability discriminations. Not even disease, war and famine, no, the real danger is nature itself, the environment we make for us. The environment we take for granted, because in four billion years the Earth has existed, nature was benign for all of four thousand years!

The time of kingdoms is past. It is part of a philosophy that has outlived its relevance, together with knights, knaves, noblemen and slaves. God does not require us to create a kingdom for Him in this world. God is Life, inseparably so. It is our responsibility to cherish the living and build a future for them all over God's mighty Universe.

The text for today's Saal, according to the "Temple Society Table of Lessons for 1996" is: Jesus is anointed at Bethany.

This story of anointment of Jesus is told three times in the Bible, in Mark 14, Luke 7 and again in John 12. There are variations in the details of the story, but in each case the kindness in the deed is defended by Jesus against the rebuke for waste, with that famous, and difficult statement, that the poor will always be with us. Would you please rise as I read Mark 14, verses 3-9 (not 8) from the King James Bible.

Thank you. -

The difficulty in the above statement attributed to Jesus is not that faith can accomplish miracles, or that sins can be forgiven, no, it is the frank admission by Jesus that the poor will always with us. It does not fit with the hope of the new testament. The poor, the deprived, the hungry, the sick and suffering, - they will always be with us? - We, as products of the modern society, of course know this is so. For our benchmarks for poverty and sickness are flexible and go up and down with the state of the economy. It is called the CPI Index. Disadvantage is a relative term, set by a given environment. The higher the standard of living is lifted, the higher the poverty line creeps. Our national health system would instantly collapse if we tried to implement it at its current level in Rwanda. What ever the state of the economy is, there will always be people richer, and people poorer, than the national average.

The statement is difficult to understand until you stand back somewhat and open your mind to the larger picture. You then can see a deeper philosophy behind these stories of Jesus. His main character in the stories is always the person that gives. The reader feels the giver's emotions in dealing with his loss and he shares in the joy through the act of giving. '*Geben ist seliger als Nehmen*' the Germans say. The benefit of the gift to the receiver is seldom, if ever, followed up. It is almost immaterial what the recipient does after the exchange of favours. It is the decision to do, the struggle with conscience, with principles, with established customs the Giver goes through, that is the essence of the story of the parable. Look at the story of the good Samaritan for instance. The poor wretched traveller who fell amongst the thieves, he has no name, no face, no cause, but everyone all over the world knows the Samaritan. Or the young man who had done all those things and yet went away heavy hearted, because it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man get to heaven. Or even with the feeding of the five thousand. It is the Giving, the Giving-up, that transcends all those stories and arouses our sympathy.

There is more joy in heaven over one repentant sinner, than over 99 just persons who need no repentance. It is almost as if the 'haves' in the world are the truly poor people, for they carry the burden of the world, for those that have not. This I feel is the paradox in the above statement on the poor in this world, that will always be with us.

It will be a long time, before we are ready to unreservedly accept that reasoning. Mankind is at the threshold of adolescence. It becomes difficult for us

to pretend to be children, just so we may enter the kingdom of heaven, and yet we are not ready to accept the responsibility of an adult. We like the comfortable feeling that someone is looking after us. That we are, after all, not responsible for our environment, for the air we breath, for the sewerage in our oceans, for overpopulation. We insist on being grown up, but have much difficulty entrusting our fate to our intellect and our instincts. We stand, with one foot still in paradise, and long for its comfort and security. Often we catch ourselves wishing someone would come and hide this bothersome tree of knowledge. Get it out of sight, like the group that wrapped up the Reichstag building in Berlin. Hide it, so we don't have to feel guilty about wisdom and its potentials. We do like to believe a little bit in Father Christmas. Even if we say, quietly to ourselves: Of course there is no such thing. It's a pretend game, for the sake of the children, you see. Children are smarter than we think. They can tell very early in life the difference between a fairy-tale and reality. You will find they also pretend to believe, in this case to please us. Because they trust us. They trust us to give them the accumulated wisdom of our time, in time, so they may become efficient custodians of their world.

We should give our new generations the opportunity to use their awakening intelligence, apply it their way, and not treat them as strangers. Only thus can they recognise the responsibility that goes with freedom and independence. And that is what I meant by using religion wisely. Let it evolve together with our environmental awareness, and use it as the efficient tool for natural education it was meant to be.

I would like to think that this philosophy is in the spirit of the idealist Christoph Hoffmann, and it is the way he would approach religion in to-days intellectual climate.

To end this Service we will sing together two more verses of our Templer Hymn 'Trachtet ruft...', that is verses 6 and 9.

6 Königreich der Lieb und Güte...

9 Nach dem hohen Ziele richte...

Music, Bach's Ave Maria

What a nice way to say Amen. Thank you to the two ladies for the music, and thank you, to you people, for coming today and listening to my Service.

I now wish you a pleasant second Advent-Sunday and remind you of the Bayswater-Boronia Community Christmas next Saturday, the 14 December, here in the Bayswater Hall.

end

KAFFEE SAAL 9 AUGUST IN BAYSWATER

Music: Sonia Glenk

Welcome to today's Kaffee-Saal. We begin the Service with the hymn "Großer Gott wir loben Dich", number three in the little green songbook, we will sing the first verse only.

For what profits a man, should he gain the whole world, and yet lose his soul?

The text for today in the Temple Society Table of Lessons comes from Matthew 16:21-28. There Jesus foreshadows his death, and makes recommendations for achieving eternal life. The whole text reads as follows:

From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the Elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying: be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

The obvious reason why those verses are grouped together is because they show Jesus fully aware of the consequences his vision will have, what reactions his own actions must provoke. Collectively they show his determination to live out the adopted prophecies, and his confidence in his ability to do so.

Individually every single one of those verses is significant enough to be taken as the subject for a whole sermon, to expand on the meaning of it, its relevance in this part of the text, and to reflect on how it fits into the overall philosophy of Jesus.

Take for instance his scathing rebuke of Peter. Peter, in well-meant words cautions him not to go to Jerusalem, not to further provoke the Pharisees: "Get behind me, Satan," Jesus shouts at Peter, "you are an offence to me...". This to the man whom he had praised above all others only a few minutes ago, in verse 18: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates

of hell shall not prevail against it.'

Or again the promise, on the subject of his return to this world "...to reward every man according to his work". What about compassion on the wretched and the poor who do not want to work? Do not the last become first?

Or indeed, the verse on the coming of the kingdom? Almost every generation since that time has had at least one prophet repeating those very words: "...some of you will experience the coming of the kingdom within your lifetime." Christoph Hoffmann himself built his Society on the wishful anticipation of people, (perhaps on a re-bond from the failed prophecies of Hahn and Bengel in 1836) of the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. - We do well to remember the original motivation of the Templers to go to Palestine, was to go and prepare Jerusalem as the most likely site for the return of our Savior.

Today I want to concentrate on the verse stated at the beginning: "For what profits a man, should he gain the whole world, and yet lose his soul?" Like all of those deep, profound sayings attributed to Jesus, the statement is difficult to understand. It is difficult to put a twentieth century interpretation on it. How can we define the soul? What do we today mean when we speak of the soul? Does wealth of necessity damage your soul? Can we still trade the soul, like Doctor Faustus of Marbach. Do ambition, greed, arrogance, and pride spring from a damaged soul? How much gain can a soul tolerate? Is there a safe level? Or is wealth a relative measure and we will forever measure our level of wealth by the people who have more than we do, not by the ones who have less.

The ancient Greek have, as is the case with most modern philosophical problems, already struggled with the concept. They were acutely aware of the duality between matter and mind. Plato was the first philosopher to define the soul as a thinking and moral entity of its own. But then he does not consistently affirm immortality, except on divine pleasure. Aristotle on the other hand taught that the soul is the first organizing principle of the living body, but he again left its distinct and permanent existence uncertain.

It was variously referred to as life or as breath. It was Christianity that elevated the soul as the main concern in man's life. The soul became all-important when salvation or loss of soul became the sole criteria for a blissful eternity. - Charles Darwin contradicted the religious assumption that man is set apart from the rest of Nature by endowment with a soul, and from Spinoza stems the philosophy in which the soul is the 'idea of a body'.

When a collection of bits acquires a meaning of its own, it has a soul. A cathedral may have a soul, a painting, the friendly family home, a cozy atmosphere, even a welcome mat expresses this type of a soul. The modern GOOD NEWS BIBLE translates soul in this instant as "life eternal".

We all die one day. Why accumulate earthly comforts and possessions if you can not take them with you, into eternal life? All the treasures that accompanied King Tutankhamen to his grave were still there 4000 years later, when Howard Carter discovered the tomb in 1922. This philosophy is well and good for those who believe in a Biblical resurrection. I can not. Not because I find it absolutely

impossible, no, I cannot believe in it because it deprives this beautiful and challenging life on this Earth of its significance.

A lifetime of watching Nature at work, recognizing its life-and-death-cycle as the driving force of evolution, makes me appreciate our sense of beauty as the highest reward possible in nature. To me, the world is reborn every day out of the night to which it is eternally tied, full of new experiences, joy and pain, a challenge to our creativity. With scientific awareness we now know that life is not supernatural, it is part of nature. We are part of nature. For me our appreciation of life, possessions and the responsibility that comes with this awareness, is God's Spirit, that is, our soul.

In my interpretation of the above phrase, Jesus refers to the satisfaction and the inner peace that comes from being tolerant to your neighbour. The sense of grace that grows in us from sharing fortunes, good and bad, with our fellow man, by not wasting the limited resources of this Earth to the detriment of humanity. These days we would perhaps call it: "Doing the right thing". I see this as the modern interpretation of what he then had to phrase in terms familiar to his people. A time when man was seen at the pleasure of many Gods, subject to their favourable disposition towards him. Jesus was a well-educated man, aware of human nature and its shortcomings. More than once did he comment on how difficult it was to make people understand his message (remember the verse above where he shouts at Peter). In a turbulent world where people searched for stability and lasting values, it is only natural he would chose words and phrases to match their understanding. The aim of religion, any religion, is to make our life, life here on earth, peaceful, worthwhile, valuable and enjoyable for all. And if this can be accomplished better with a promise of an appropriate reward (or punishment) in a hereafter, beyond corruptive challenges, the choice is easy. That is my interpretation, but lets go back to the story.

Does Jesus make a sweeping statement or does he refer to a specific incident. I think he goes further than just reply to Peter's words of caution. The proverb seems to imply that all ambitions are corrupt, and it mixes pride with determination. Was not Jesus himself determined in his own way, even to death defending his own philosophy? He called it doing God's will. YOUR WILL be done. Where does ordinary man draw the line between ambition and divine cause? Or, in modern language, when does the end justify the means? If you must believe in the divinity of Jesus to justify his actions then those same actions can not apply equally to man. It would be comparable to you, standing on a safe pier, shouting to a drowning man to go and take swimming lessons.

We Templers have taken the decisive step and accept Jesus as a man. A gifted man, a godly man, but mortal nevertheless. For us only thus can we truly appreciate the monumental task he set himself. But then how do we humble his ambitions? A poor man can just as easily loose his dignity, his soul, be cruel, as one who feels rich. To all intent and purposes the Good Samaritan was not poor.

He did not ask the man at the inn to take pity on the poor, beaten up traveller, and care for him, out of the goodness of his heart. No, he paid the innkeeper for all expenses. It is not wealth, nor riches that Jesus condemns here. It is the chasing after them, the desire to possess, to own for owning sake. Physical things have no meaning in themselves. They are neither good nor bad. How we use them gives it those attributes. Is owning a motor car pretentious, bad? Or does it enable me to work more effectively, better help my neighbour, perhaps give a weary traveller a lift? In reality none of all the things we call our own truly belong to us. Not the land, not our house, not the pets, not even our children are ours to do with as we please. Look at it more like a custodianship. Possessions are yours as long as you face the responsibility that comes with them.

The above proverb of Jesus is in my opinion his way to protect us from the curse of envy. It is the effect those things can have on our mental attitude, to life, to our environment, to those less endowed with good fortune, which is being addressed here. Removing temptation altogether may make good sense, but an all-to literal interpretation is futile. There is no way man can live on this Earth without possessions of some sort. They are a fundamental necessity of life. Even if we try to reduce private property to the absolute minimum, as has been the case in monasteries, or under communism, there will always be small discrepancies to fuel envy and pride. Human nature is very adaptable and quickly adjusts all its functions to a new level, to any given environment. Reducing the margins will not reduce temptation itself. You can own a thousand-hectare farm and begrudge your neighbour's new combine harvester, or you may live in the Altersheim where personal gains are measured by a smile from a nursing sister.

Envy is the sign of a small mind, rich or poor. It is like a cancer eating into your vital parts. Unchecked it eventually destroys your capacity for all other noble emotions. It is not your own wealth that is the danger to you, but the value you place on the gains of your neighbour. - Whether you are rich in knowledge or in worldly possessions need not affect your humility towards God or your neighbor. Only your inner self can do that. Wisdom they call it, when you come to realize how little you know of infinity, and when awareness grows in you of the impotence of wealth to deal with social problems. At what step, on the ladder to riches, do you think you are in danger of losing your soul? When you bank your first dollar? Or when you donate your first million dollars to charity?

Sonia Glenk has found a new song for us, its title reminds me of the Templer hymn, but it is different. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God..." let's try it. The text is on the sheets distributed, two verses. Sonia will play the melody through once before starting.

The Templer kingdom of God is of this world. Our way of thinking makes it our responsibility to combine worldly wealth with a compassionate soul. And we do not abandon this duty to institutionalized restrictions. The alternative is truly "... harder to get to heaven than for a camel to pass through the night gate of a city, the proverbial eye of a needle". Matthew 19:24. And, we would be tempted to ask

with the disciples in Matthew 19:25 “Master, who then can be saved?” To which Jesus answers in his inscrutable way, “with men this may be impossible; but with God all things are possible”. And he goes on into the parable of the value of work in the vineyard, where all workers are paid the same day’s wages regardless of the hours worked. A philosophy that was 2,000 years before its time, before Social Security and Work-Cover: Payment related to need rather than actual work done!

Christoph Hoffmann was very much motivated by this thought, which he presented to us in the Templer Hymn as *“Der Herr der die Arbeit im Weinberg vermietet beruft uns zum Werk und verheißt uns den Lohn”*.

I was talking to a friend the other day about the current unemployment problem and its social consequences. He was shocked by my simple (simplistic he called it) approach to this problem. Such a complicated problem could not possibly have a simple solution. - But all it requires is a similar philosophy to work as that taken in the vineyard-parable above. An appreciation of the different needs people have to give meaning to daily life. All too often these days work is presented as a universal drudgery, as stupid and mindless, and we call people “clever” when they get away without having to do it. Work is seen as something you do from 9 to 5, for five days a week, so that you can enjoy the so called true meaning of life: pleasure in your spare time and on holidays. Now I say, we must change this image we have of work. To work is to do, to create, to live. Work is life. Work is too precious a commodity to waste on those who do not appreciate it. Work should be reserved for those who realize the satisfaction and the therapeutical benefits, the feeling of well-being and creative joy we can derive only from work.

So, I said, only those people who want to work, those who enjoy work, should be allowed to work. There is no need to work otherwise. We don’t look for permanent employment, there is no work-related pay, no holidays, no overtime, work is its own reward. There is the satisfaction of a good day’s work done, the pride in being part of creating a new tomorrow, the intellectual stimulation of mixing with people in such a motivating environment. It is not impossible, we do it everyday in our communities. We call it volunteering. The necessities of life should be free, for all, from students to parents to pensioners. If you want to possess lots of things, go ahead, get them. But with possession comes responsibility to look after that possession. And, being available to everyone, excesses lose their appeal.

A glimmer of such a philosophy to ownership is already visible today: No longer can a farmer ruthlessly exploit the land he owns and cause widespread soil degradation. The land must be farmed in sustainable agriculture. A man can have as much land as he wants, provided he has the capacity to physically care for it. The community supports those farmers who care for the environment. Or again, the number of pets that you may keep depends on your capacity to care for them. If you neglect them, you are not fit to have quite so many, possibly none at all. If caring for items of luxury provides you with the necessary meaning and satisfaction in life, you are welcome to them. It is the competitive value you place on them that is the danger to your soul. The challenge man must face living in an affluent society is to use his intellect to set practical consumption limits on himself, limits technology and a rich environment no longer impose.

Wouldn't this be the ultimate social Society? A Society where envy is restricted to intangible things, such as creative ability, better education, health, all the things money can not buy, including a kind soul?

It will never work, my friend said, go and face reality. But then, in another 2,000 years, with greater public awareness of the limited resources available to us on this Earth, with greater intellectual challenges for our survival, - public sentiment may demand such a social revolution. Maybe then we can appreciate Jesus' "with God (and good will) all things are possible".

Whatever the future holds in store for mankind it must include those things that nature has provided us with, those which have proven beneficial in the struggle of natural selection by their very existence. Science and technology have given us latitude to live out artificial fantasies that measure quality of life in terms approaching the fleeting reigns of political governments. In the long run evolution must be self-sustaining if it is not eventually to exceed even our human resourcefulness.

We recognize the need in man to believe in an ultimate purpose in life. No matter how convincing scientific arguments for a nihilistic attitude may sound, they are futile. There must be a meaning in life for us, even if it is just for the duration of a short natural life span. Our mind needs it. Our consciousness demands it. Some may find this meaning in the preparation for an afterlife. I find mine in this world, and in Nature, where I come across God's footsteps every day. I feel his presence in the morning mist, his majesty in tall trees, his rage in a thunderstorm, his vastness in the night sky, his kindness in the smile of a friend and his compassion in the quietness of my soul, wherever that may be located.

If our forebears had not embraced the God of life as a social necessity, if religion had not passed on to us the essentials for such a belief, we would have had to create the spiritual environment ourselves, just as every civilization that ever existed in recorded history has taken this path. But to me above all other reasons, there stands Life itself. A life that struggled out of the confines of physical restrictions. As a cause it transcends everything we could strive for, even the Templer Kingdom of God. I see the function of such a kingdom as an aid to the progress of humanity, not as a meaning to Life. It helps to provide the social environment that we see as conducive to further human progress.

Progress to what, though? The goal we collectively set ourselves, as a species: Life!

Let us pray:

God of Life, thank you for this beautiful kingdom you have given to us. You are the foundation of life, the soul of my neighbor and of my neighbor's neighbor. Thank you that we can see each other in the light of Life. Help us to recognize that what we have in common, so we may share the joys with each other.

Help us to appreciate our differences and see them as extensions of our own limited capacities. Let the light of life spread your kingdom to all the stars and to the end of the universe. To your greater glory.

Amen

YOUTH SAAL IN BENTLEIGH 26 APRIL 1998

Welcome on this “Good Shepherd’s” Sunday. Today’s Service is a Youth Saal. The theme is youth. To begin with let us all join voices in the hymn “Großer Gott wir loben Dich...”...

The text for today comes from Mark 10:13-16. Chapter 10 is rich in thoughts of Jesus and his sayings. There is the marriage vow, the blessing of the children, the story of the young man with a heavy heart for he was not poor, the camel and the eye of a needle, the first and the last, and Jesus’ vision of the cup he has to drink. Verses 13-16 concern the blessing of the children and read as follows:

And they brought young children to Jesus, that he should touch them, and [his] disciples rebuked those that brought [them]. But when Jesus saw [it], he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put [his] hands upon them, and blessed them.

There are many definitions of what we understand by youth, in the term Youth. To some it is a freedom from responsibility, from worries about tomorrow, from deadlines. For others it is the feeling of limitless opportunities, anything is possible, the joy in little things, the feeling of wonder at the world. Or again it may be the belief in the future, the scope of learning what is ahead of us, the prospect of doing all the things grown-ups do. And then there are those for whom youth is all the things we once did and can no longer do, through either physical inability or social restrictions.

At the moment I have an advantage over many of you here, in that I can read the TR before you see it. In the May TR for instance there is an article on remembering the ‘good old days’. There are in fact lots of reminiscences in the May TR, (I shall come back to that) but in this particular one about the Good Old Days there is a short re-quote of Lilo Thaler’s story called “The Stone of Youth”. The title may be a paraphrase for the search for truth in the eighteenth and nineteenth century embodied in the mythological stone of wisdom, “*dem Stein der Weisen*”.

The story defines youth as follows: Being young means a love of wonder, rapture in the face of shining things and shining thoughts, a longing for all that is new, and the ability to feel pleasure and joy. Young is to see beauty in boldness and courage, to be able to receive the message of greatness and strength of the Earth around us, offered by a Person or by the Infinite. You are old only when all the strings of your heart are broken, when winter lies heavily upon you and your enthusiasm is covered by the snow of pessimism, frozen in the ice of cynicism. Then, only then will you be really old, and may God have mercy on your soul.

It is a very moving, a very touching description. It goes straight to the heart

and evokes sentiments of longing for the undescribable bond which unites us all, the mysterious, the impossible. Does a young person see itself like that? I doubt it. It is a picture of innocence, of idealised life in paradise, painted by an old person reflecting on what could have been.

In the children's section of this May TR is illustrated the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The illustration shows them strolling together amongst the trees. There are trees for everything, bananas, apples, ice cream, hot dogs. In Paradise everything the heart desires was once readily available to the inhabitants. Adam and Eve could eat whatever they liked, drink to their hearts content, do what they felt like, and needed neither bodily coverings nor an abode for shelter or security. They had it all, everything was theirs, whenever they wanted it, for as long as they wanted it. As long - that is, as long as they remained unaware of the implications of right and wrong, of good and evil.

At some stage it was inevitable they had to face the tree of knowledge. I know it is a children's story, but bear with me, this is after all a youth Saal. Just imagine it for a moment! Picture it! Think of it! Think of the implications. I have to say it again, as long as neither of them ate of the tree of knowledge, as long as neither Adam nor Eve was aware of what they were doing, not aware of the wider implication of their action on the environment, on other people (if there were any) or their own bodies, there was no right or wrong, no good or evil in the world. Do you see what the story is telling us? It tells us, without a conscious mind, without an adult awareness, there is no fundamental right or wrong in Nature. It does not exist. The terms are human inventions. Awareness of the tree of Knowledge suddenly divides the world into two camps, one camp we label right the other one wrong. Even today we find there is no good or evil in the world unless we can link its cause to man's actions.

We often see this philosophy demonstrated in the popular press, in arguments against a new technological proposal. Draining a swamp for development purposes is wrong, evil. But creating a swamp (from sewerage spillage or mine tailings or whatever human action) is immediately assumed bad. A natural lake is something beautiful, it sustains the ecosystem with waterbirds, fishes, tall trees and an animal population. A man-made lake of necessity must be bad because it interferes with an existing, natural ecosystem, often considered unique and fragile, and it alters it. The tree of knowledge divides us into two camps: those who see the benefits arising from our actions for man's quality of life on Earth, and those who see nothing but evil in guided, purposeful evolution.

To me Paradise pictures the innocence of a child. It is the longing we old people have for the carefree, good old days, the days when the sign posts of right and wrong, good and evil, left and right were still being assembled in the mental workshop between our ears. When the land was open range, without fences and without warning signs proclaiming "trespassers will be prosecuted". When mother night with a black, star-studded sky begs for the moon to shine on our path, and tall trees stand on the side of the road, like sentinels to watch our progress. When the possibilities were endless, when we could aspire to any profession that caught our imagination. When we still believed adults could do anything they set

their minds on. Where nothing is impossible.

The story of the Paradise then, the story of growing awareness in Adam and Eve, is the story of youth struggling to come to terms with information a child's philosophy is no longer capable to handle. Science has taught us an awareness of the world around us, given us an understanding of the mechanism involved. It prepared us for the changes in our bodily functions as we grow to adulthood, of what to expect. We still marvel at the way a caterpillar turns into a beautiful butterfly, but we know about metamorphisms and we can explain how it happens. That is the fruit from the tree of knowledge we consciously accept as part of a mature mind. A mind which is no longer satisfied with childish explanations of the workings of Nature, a mind which makes a division between right and wrong, between good and evil. Once this awareness matures in man, life in Paradise is no longer an acceptable alternative.

We did not get thrown out of Paradise, we chose to leave, we left on our own free will. The archangel Gabriel, guarding its entrance with his sword, symbolises the impossibility to reverse this process in our mind. When we leave behind childish dreams and childish speaking, we take on the responsibility for our behaviour, for our lives, for our home, for the immediate environment and even for the Earth we live on, and no amount of pretending to childish innocence will relieve us from this burden. We do not have the choice of not drinking from this cup. Youth is not the easy stage in life many see in retrospect.

Youth ends when a realisation of social reality has taken over that simple picture of a child's world. Once people start telling you to grow up and act your age, once daydreaming has to be done in secret, that's when you know you have entered the world of adults, you realise the doors of youth have been closed behind you. Instead of saying 'I wish I was seventeen so I can get my licence so I can drive a car, instead of impatiently waiting for your next birthday to arrive, so you can join the club - you, and the people around you, now measure time in accomplishments (or the lack of it) and you watch the mountain of commitments grow in front of you. Before you know it, the community will approach you to make that socio-religious commitment to join the Temple Society as an active member. Suddenly the decisions you make will not just affect today, not just yourself, they affect your future and the future of your family and your children. You have now left Paradise, there is no turning back.

When that time comes to you, when the question of TSA membership is raised, take it up, please do so, from personal experience I can heartily recommend it. For the Temple Society is an example of something that is in principle eternally young. It is a vision of a young mind. It thrives on new ideas and changes. Its non-dogmatic philosophies are open ended and always ready to accept your input towards its own evolution. It is a religion created by the people, for the people. It allows me to stand here before you and talk about my philosophy, my religious experiences, my *Weltanschauung*. It grows with you. Do not let imaginary restrictions or established practices deter you from active participation. If you do, you have not grasped the full implications of Christoph Hoffmann's vision. Guidelines are not barb-wire fences. It is you, the people with ideas, with the abundance

of enthusiasm that characterizes youth, who will shape the Society's appearance and its future character.

The TSA needs you and the diversity you bring with you.

In the growing awareness of today's social environment, Templar Religion (I make a distinction between Templar Philosophy and Templar Religion) is not so far outside the general concept of religious freedom anymore. Our interpretation of the biblical events no longer shock the general public. In fact, if we do not advance our religious awareness from the 150 year old founding- father-concepts, then it is us, the Templars, who will soon be considered behind the times, and dogmatic in correctness. In a Saal in Boronia, last November, Rolf Beilharz spoke of the necessity to see the Jesus of the Bible as a human being. For us today to make sense of the message in the Gospels we have to relate to him as a man, a man with human ideals and human limitations. A man who tried set us an example of life on this Earth, a way of life which everyone can follow, even we, with our own human imperfections. But those imperfection in us include an inability to grasp abstract expressions if they are not linked to physical realities.

Let us take love for instance: Jesus teaches love. It is his main theme. Love your God, love your neighbour. Love is now portrayed as the solution to all our worldly problems. Has love suddenly assumed also the mantel of just, and right? A word that takes on such a wide interpretations as love did, may loose its value as a descriptive definition, and may well become a useless platitude. Love can be understood to mean different things to different people, and evoke different emotions under different circumstances. Try replacing the word love with an affirmative action word and see how difficult these glib general statements suddenly become. Even help, honour, respect, are generalities. It must be replaced by a do word, such as: talk to, go to, give, donate.

Remember the tree of knowledge. What we must be careful of, in following the path of Jesus, is not to idolise this image of Jesus. The last thing we want is to create a new golden calf. It is the vision Jesus had (not the man Jesus) we affirm, the vision that a better world can be brought about by our actions, by our attitude to life, by our awareness of the suffering of our neighbour and the practical steps we can take to improve man's lot. As Rolf said so nicely: Striving for the Kingdom is simply a striving for perfect relations among people. The tree of knowledge is the burden of a conscious awareness in us, an awareness that there is a better way.

How can we make use of this greater awareness? How do we contribute to this challenging adventure, to the better world we envisage? How does one "strive to perfection"? Felix Haar has often given the answer, and admonished us with the cry of the prophets: change your attitude. "*Ändert euren Sinn*". But what is it we must do to change our attitude? It obviously can not just be a dogmatic instruction (see also "How the Mind Works" in the attached Appendix). We now know our mind is an active part of our environment. It interacts with its surroundings. It is motivated by stimulation through its senses of see, hear, feel, smell, taste, and responds in a physical activity feedback. We know we can collectively

change our environment, physically. We just admitted the environment moulds our mind; the books we read, the company we keep, the films we watch, all determine what motivates our mind and in which direction it evolves and expands.

Returning to next month's TR once more, I have already mentioned how much reminiscences it contains, pages and pages of it. 15 in fact. Memories of past times, the outpourings of an ageing population. When you receive your copy of the May TR see if you can find the JG contribution. It is one singular page. Our imbalance in emphasis is glaringly obvious. I have said it before, it is of little use wondering about the creeping average age of membership when we provide an environment that primarily caters for pensioners and age care. When the Society's investments are almost exclusively channelled towards the Elderly aim.

JG, please make yourself heard (and read), not just for your own advantage, but for the good of the TSA and its future. We are what we practice, what we read and what we think.

The eastern suburbs are such a favourite home site for young families because parents feel instinctively the trees, the hills, the variety of natural wonders in the east it is a good environment to mould growing minds in an awareness of nature. It is not only the industrialised nature of the west that influences that decision. There is industry in the east too. We know that if we send our children to a good school they will not only learn the three Rs, but also a sense of responsibility for life and property, and a value for achievement. Knowing all this I feel it is imperative that we provide the type of environment for future generations in which their minds can appreciate the values we treasure. **That is my understanding of striving.** Young people are very sensitive to double standards. It is not good enough to remind young minds to love your God if such a message is not enforced by an environment demonstrating the meaning of such love.

The society of man is a product of evolution, it is years and years of competitive intellectual struggle with practicalities. And there is no end in sight to this evolution. The society of man has evolved. What was once viewed as the ultimate goal to man's aspirations, God's Kingdom on Earth, is here now, and we are its architects. Look around you, the banana trees, the apple trees, even the Mac Donald Ice Cream trees are everywhere. This is Paradise. Let us work together in a practical religion on this paradise Earth, the small blue dot in a vast empty universe which we call home, over which God has given us dominion.

We have mastered the seven seas, we have discovered the secrets of flight, we have tamed the power of the electron and spanned the world with a communication network. Let us talk to each other, work together, plan ahead and create the environment conducive to foster a mind receptive to the need for each other and ready to thrive in creative joy. Greater human awareness of a natural order in the universe has given us the intellectual tools to do so. Nature has endowed us with an ability to think, to decide what is right and wrong, and we would be negligent in our duty to society and to the environment if we did not use this God-given facility, each to the best of our individual ability, in striving for the kingdom of life.

Our aim is the establishment of a kingdom for the living, a kingdom for a society rich in humane values and in scientific awareness.

Let us pray:

Dear God,

Help us use the gifts you have so richly endowed us with, to the best of our ability.

Guide us when we misuse the trust you have placed in us.

Remind us not to load you with responsibilities you have delegated to us,

So that we may discover our selves and the wonders of your universe

To your greater glory.

Amen.

To end this Service let us all together sing the hymn

“Wie groß ist des Allmächt’gen Güte...”

Thank you Sonia for the music, thanks Anna for the flowers and thank you everybody for coming and sharing this morning’s contemplation with us.

FOUNDER'S SAAL IN BAYSWATER, DECEMBER 1999

Prelude and accompaniments by Krista Imberger

Welcome to today's Founder's Service. To begin with let us sing two verses from the Templer Hymn,

"Trachtet ruft mit ernstem Worte..." verse 1 and 2.

Some 50 years ago the powerful and motivating idea of Templer Settlements in Palestine came to an abrupt end. It had been an attempt by our forefathers, by the founders of the Temple Society, to cultivate Christianity in practising Christian values amongst people living close to each other, aware of each other's needs, in tight communities in Palestine. It was hoped the community environment would foster a Templer Spirit, which in turn would spread over the narrow boundaries of the little colonies, encouraging others to join the movement. After almost 90 years the idea came to an end. And because the end was an enforced termination, we are forever left wondering what could have been had it been left alone.

Much of the material I am using today (including the above introduction) is based on Peter Lange's collection entitled *"Templer Handbuch"*. The Handbuch, with its well-chosen articles and commentaries, helps us to put the past into perspective and frees us to look forward to the Society's evolution in the future. The contents are applicable to a wide range of Templer philosophies, including today's theme of "the Changing Face of Templer Communities". I find it a valuable source of references and ideas. I am indebted to Peter's diligence for the historic details used today, and to his foresight with stimulating quotations. If I have extended some of his suggestions beyond the goals stipulated by him, if I have defined those goals differently to what he had in mind, I apologise to him and to you and hope you will look at it in the spirit in which my work is given: As an expression of the will to build on our past.

Christoph Hoffmann once said: *"Templers are not trying to establish a new religious structure. We are confirming a belief in the practical possibilities of the Kingdom of God amongst man. Such a belief does need an awareness of the necessary steps involved in this search, it does need planning. But the strength of our belief is not in any-one plan or commitment, Templer spirit is in the will to build; to build with the best tools time and environment provide us with (and that includes science, technology and philosophical insight) in the struggle towards realising such a Society of Man."*

What would have happened in Palestine if Templer continuance there had not been terminated there. Would the communities have survived the onslaught of progress intact? Or would the social and psychological barriers surrounding and protecting them at the time have broken down, exposing the individuals to the detracting influences of big-city life? I was not there anymore at the end of the war, but from what I hear from others this disruptive force was already well on the way

to stripping the communities of their young people. Earlier in the Palestine period these settlements with their organised social structure were an effective system of collecting people into groups, in which individuals helped each other to raise their quality of life and their standard of living to an acceptable level. And because this standard of living was then above the country's general level, it proved very successful. Settlements prospered in size up to 500 people.

For some strange reason Templer communities did not seem to want (or were unable) to exceed this limit. None of the settlements ever developed into a city. Here in Australia, I feel that the country's balanced affluence, and the associated lifestyle (together with a higher level of education) have changed member's priorities again. The need for community support and the dependence on its facilities gradually diminished, and not surprisingly, the traditional community structure finds it hard to cope. For a community to continue to grow and attract members beyond the numbers needed for a personal involvement level, it now must cater for an independent lifestyle, which automatically seems to make a closely managed community environment irrelevant, even intrusive. Community services are, to these self-sufficient, well educated people just duplication of what is available already from government agencies. We all have heard the sort of answer that brings with it: Why should I send my child to the Templer group when I have a similar activity closer by. Why should I send my youngsters to the Templer German School when they can have German tuition at the State School with far less hassles? It is this Supermarket mentality of the parents, this "why should I?", we have to front up to, recognise and interpret correctly.

The conventional approach is to blame it on the parents: "Well, they don't have the proper commitment". "No Templer Spirit". That's easily said, but does it solve anything? No! It is no better than issuing a decree to that effect. We must ask ourselves why do some people have such a commendable commitment and others clearly do not? Is it unrealistic to expect it from everybody? What does it take to draw those others in? What must we do to touch the minds of those "none-believers"? But wait, if put this way the problem seems to be with us, with the community - and what we could or should be doing! Could it be, the fault lies not with them - but with us? Is the reason for our shrinking membership to be found in our righteous attitude to the problem? What do you think? Is there a way in which you could persuade your reluctant child, or your recalcitrant friend, to join the community environment? What would it take to make it possible? A lot of effort? Ah, and what would it take to make you want to put in that effort?

The ethicist Margarete Southerland recently spoke on the importance of language in the formation of character. 'You are what you speak'. The actor on stage eventually becomes the character he portrays on that stage. **"Shape your environment while you still can,"** she says, **"for in time the environment will definitely shape you."**

A community is such an environment. It shapes us even as we create it. What we make it - will determine what we will become. A Kingdom of God is such an environment. It will only ever be as harmonious as we are prepared to make it. If

we do not believe in it ourselves, if we do not have a vision of how to realise this belief, then what? It won't grow. It will only ever develop to the degree people can visualise and believe in it.

The text for today comes from Luke 15, verses 1 - 7, and in the King James Bible reads as follows:

Then drew near, unto him all the publicans and sinners to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them. And he spoke this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he has found it, he will lay it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, who need no repentance.

A parable is a good example of what I have been trying to explain before. It is a miniature picture-environment supporting a logical argument. The parable prepares the mind for an otherwise controversial conclusion. The environment provides the background out of which the essence of the story emerges. Jesus was a master of creating the intellectual atmosphere to make his point in the parables. With a few simple words he paints the circumstances and then miraculously lets the paradox dissolve before our eyes. - There is more fuss made in the Regional Council over one new TSA member than over ninety and nine existing, righteous Templers. - Jesus had a profound insight into human nature.

If you have read my invitation to today's Founder's Service in the Templer Record you will also have noticed the questions I have posed regarding Templer Communities. The shock wave that started this review was of course a statement made at the Annual General Assembly of the TSA in September this year, here in this hall. In a nutshell it said: Lack of interest in the position of Community Head in Bayswater shows that people feel communities are no longer an essential part of the Temple Society! - I have since read up in the Templer Literature on the subject and not once have I found mention of a society without communities. On the contrary, a community environment is always considered as the basis for our Templer Religious values, for putting the teachings of Jesus into practice, for living what we preach. "Hoffmann", so it says on the blue dust-cover of part 1 of OCCIDENT AND ORIENT, *"Hoffmann dedicated his life to collecting people striving for such a Kingdom, and setting up Communities in which their striving would express itself in life."* Or in another quote *"..the Templer vision is not hidden in religious literature, but is recognised in their community activities"*.

So, did the Templers lose their enthusiasm and their belief in Templer Communities, or are there other explanations for the lack of interest and support shown? Such as loss of purpose and meaning perhaps? Fading vision of the

foretold Kingdom? The task seems to big? Insufficient acknowledgement? Could these be reasons why no-one wants to take on responsibility? Would remuneration strengthen the authority of the office?

The point made in the beginning, that the community settlement in Palestine did not really have a chance to develop to their full potential because of interruptions by forces beyond their control, is misleading. The implication there being, under ideal circumstances things would have been different. I personally do not share this view. To me, ideal circumstances are usually artificial environments, unnatural and unsuitable to produce healthy and sustainable growth. Ideal social conditions would not require people to group in communities, it would not need a Kingdom of God. A vision of a Kingdom of God in isolation from the real world is useless. There are always disruptive forces at work, if not from outside then from within. This is natural. Like the wind that ripples through the leaves of a tree and flexes the wood in the trunk to breaking point. Both leaves and trunk have to weather the wind, for the wind is needed to bring the rain, to circulate the air, to pollinate the flowers - and to topple the dead trees to make way for new growth.

Harmony in this world means living and growing with the environment, using all the natural resources to best advantage. If the Templer colonies in Palestine did not develop beyond the original concept it may be because the concept did not evolve.

Balance the environment with the resources. The resources of a community are its people. People of all shapes and sizes, and of all social talents, orientations and motivations. We are the cells in the body of the community. Did you know that all the trillions of cells in your body each have the full instructions within themselves to make another you? All it takes for this potential to become reality is to have a need for it. Of the billions of people in this world every person is endowed with the same basic knowledge and functionality. Their so called talents are what they develop individually beyond what they use in daily life.

They also need a meaningful way to apply those talents. They want to be creative. And the environment must provide the need. Looking through the municipal community directories can be an education in psychology. Do you know the average council has over a thousand individual organisations, services, clubs or groups? And each one is an avenue where a small number of people can express their talents in a personal way; in a way that satisfies the individual's creative urge or their need to help others. Ursula and I, together with a few others, have recently formed a group out our way, for the preservation of a historic site. We call ourselves the Friends of Kurth Kiln. To our amazement we now find it is not money that is the pressing problem, it is ideas and their creative application that prove the greatest challenges. How do we best increase public awareness of the site? How to develop its natural potentials? Parks Victoria has literally hundreds of such groups, giving the organisation a resource of land care possibilities that taps the general public's pulse. I look at a community as a managed environment designed to produce a desired result. An occasional review is healthy to ensure the environment maintained is effective in serving the aims.

To return to the five questions raised in my invitation. Here are my answers to them:

- 1. Has our vision of a Templer Community kept pace with reality?** I say no! Our image of a community is still based on helping and protecting the poor, while the majority of the membership nowadays is well-off and well educated, looking for ways to express their creative drive in their own way.
- 2. How to increase members' participation?** Let the people organise themselves. Give them responsibility. Let them participate when and how they would like to, in their own time and at their own rate. Increase diversity. We should cater for the need of people to express their talents and contribute in a way that motivates them and their friends. The community this way becomes a sink rather than a source of services.
- 3. Is our model tied to outmoded concepts?** Yes. Community members are no longer held together by an economic rationale. Educated and intelligent, they have funds of their own, and require a professional to look after and manage their community assets gainfully. This person should not be the head of the community nor an Elder of the Society, for the two functions are not always compatible. That would raise the status of the office and at the same time ease the burden on the community head. It is a social evolution taking place in society at large we have to reflect.
- 4. What role does a community environment play in our life today?** People in their daily life need familiar surroundings to provide security. They need a community of friends to belong to. A community environment makes a person feel generous. The typical community needs to be small enough to let the average individual (or his group) and his contribution amount to something. But these days people do no longer have to be spatially grouped together to form a community. With effortless and instant communication world-wide even the Internet can be the link.
- 5. Do we need communities to foster Templer Spirit?** The first requirement in loving your neighbour is to have neighbours, and an opportunity to practise. People relating to people also needs a common focus, that is, some form of community structure. But the structure must be flexible and respond to individual efforts. If an idea is to become more than a pipe dream, if a vision is to develop into a growing reality, it needs to be based on these fundamental requirements of people. Beyond that, this question requires a re-definition of the expression Templer Spirit and the Templer vision of the Kingdom of God.

A different community structure does not necessarily mean what has been done before was wrong. Evolution in social conditions requires a certain flexibility in the form of the community, and diversity of form gives us a greater chance of survival. As Peter Lange says in the Handbuch; "...the loss of the Palestine Communities can also be seen as a challenge by destiny not to become stuck in outdated conventions". The outdated convention is that all members must be sin-

gle minded. Evolvement toward the ultimate aim should be on as broad a front as possible. I do think an awareness of the relationship between the mind of a person and the environment he or she finds herself in can be a valuable tool for any organisation in managing its people. Let the environment change a person's mind rather than arguments. I suppose it ties in with the old proverb "action speaks louder than words". Judged by the relentless changes in God's Nature all around us, even the Kingdom of God may not have a permanent configuration.

Let us pray

Dear God, thank you for making the sun rise in the morning and letting it rest in the evening. Thank you for giving us the changing seasons, the flowers, the colours and their passing glory. Thank you for creating diversity in man through which we can explore the four corners of your kingdom, and learn to recognise permanency in chaos. Most of all we thank you for our mind, the awareness that allows us to give expression to your spirit within us.

Amen

We conclude with singing hymn number five in the green songbook, "Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund..." verses 1, 4 and 8.

Postlude

Thank you Krista Imberger and thank you all for coming today. I now wish everyone a pleasant third Advent Sunday.

SAAL 11 JULY 1999 IN BORONIA

Prelude, Monika Frank

Grüss Gott. Zu Beginn singen wir das Lied, "Großer Gott wir loben dich". Verse 1 & 5 im grünen Handbuch. Willkommen heute in unserer Boronia Halle.

Nirgendwo in unserer Gesellschaft finden wir Gemeindegut so reich an lebendiger Geschichte, an Templer Historie, wie diese Halle. Hier herrscht eine erdverbundene Atmosphäre von Schubkarren und Schaufel, frischgesägtem Holz, Zement und Farbe. Wenn die Wände Zungen hätten würden sie erzählen von Festlichkeiten, von Hochzeiten, Darstellung und Konfirmation; würden lachen über die lustigen Spiele die sie gesehen haben und weinen mit den Trauernden bei Beerdigungen. Viele von euch waren an diesem Halle Bau beteiligt oder haben sonstwie zu ihrer Konstruktion beigetragen; sind hier in die Samstags und Sonntagsschule gegangen, wurden hier konfirmiert, oder haben, wie ich, sich den Segen für ihr Eheleben hier geholt. Dankbar gedenken wir der vorgegangenen Generation die in selbstbewußter Sicherheit die Opfer an Zeit und Material dafür gaben.

Die Halle wurde am 7 September 1957 eingeweiht. Hier wurde mehr als ein Gebäude errichtet, hier liegt der Grundstein auf dem die Temple Society Australia aufgebaut wurde. Sie war das Muster, ein Beispiel, sie war der Beweis, daß hier-zulande tatsächlich der Templer Gemeindegut wachsen kann - wenn er bewußt gepflegt wird. Über 40 Jahre sind das her, und für Australien ist 40 Jahre Geschichte ein guter Teil der neuzeitlichen Vergangenheit. Aber noch mehr als das, sie sind ein wesentlicher Teil der Templer Entwicklung. Ich habe es schon einmal betont: Für die Tempel Gesellschaft ist der nahezu 50jährige Bestand in Australien eine der längsten stabilen Perioden die sie in ihrer turbulenten Geschichte erleben durfte. Das ist das Vermächtnis, ist der Schatz, der für mich in diesen Mauern verborgen liegt, ein Tempel von lebenden Bausteinen Gottes erbaut.

Lebende Bausteine. Der Begriff sollte wohl etwas Freundliches sein, aber tief in mir erregt der Ausdruck einen Grusel, ein Angstgefühl, eine Beklemmung. Die Angst eingeengt zu sein, in Atemnot, vor dem lebendigen Tod. Unwillkürlich kommt mir Theodor Storms Novelle "der Schimmelreiter" in den Sinn, vom Menschenopfer im Deich, das als lebender Geist in abergläubiger Scheu die wütenden Elemente sollte beschwichten. - Mit aller Kraft wehre ich mich, wo ich kann, instinktiv dagegen Teil einer unbeugsamen Struktur zu sein, egal ob intellektuell oder physikalisch, in bürokratischer Ordnung oder in religiöser Formalität. Jegliche Art dogmatischer Kontrolle scheint mir naturwidrig. Oft habe ich mich gefragt ob es anderen Menschen wohl auch so geht? Ob sie wirklich genugsam, wie ein Baustein auf vier Seiten eingemauert, freudig in der Last des Gebäudes ihre Lebens-Aufgabe sehen? Wohl kaum! Vielleicht hat deshalb niemand außer den Templern je die Idee der lebendigen Bausteine aufgegriffen.

Im 19 Jahrhundert war noch Schicksal, wie man sich geduldig (oder

ungeduldig) in eine Lebensbahn "schicken" muß, sehr aktuell. Unaufhaltsam schien man seinem Los geweiht, in hoffnungsloser Hingabe, sowohl beruflich als auch im sozialen Lebensstatus. Das war einmal. Indem Hoffmann die Dogmen beseitigte brach er für uns die Schranken und gab der Gesellschaft den Weg frei zum sich Entwickeln. - Selbst das Sühneopfer Jesus, denke ich, die vorbestimmte Todessuche als Opfer zur Beseitigung der dozierten Ungnade Gottes sollte nicht mehr verherrlicht werden. In vollem Bewußtsein heutigen Wissens kann man unmöglich dulden daß solche Grauen noch als unvermeidlich glorifiziert werden. Ich komme nachher nochmals darauf zurück.

Im Vermächtnis dieser Mauern liegt die Verantwortung, das Templertum zu pflegen. Dazu müssen wir uns fragen, was heißt es heute, ein Templer zu sein? Diese Frage scheint uns, die wir im Schoße der Tempelgesellschaft geborgen sind, vielleicht unwichtig. Wir wissen doch was wir damit meinen. Templer sein ist - eben so sein wie wir sind! Oder nicht? Versuch aber mal, das einem Fremden zu erklären und schon sind wir in Trouble. Wir probieren es wohl zuerst mit den üblichen Schlagwörtern wie, Trachtet nach dem Reich Gottes, Liebe deinen Nächsten. Was mache ich aber wenn er dann fragt, wie trachtest du denn nach dem Reich Gottes; und wo verwirklicht sich deine Liebe zum Nächsten? - Vielleicht denkt ihr nun, jemand der das nicht von selber weiß ist sowieso kein rechter Christ - warum sollen wir uns mit Dem abgeben. Damit kommen wir aber zum Kern des Argumentes: Soll die Tempel Gesellschaft dauern, so sind wir auf Zuwachs von außen angewiesen, und die - da draußen - leben ganz gut, thank you very much, auch ohne uns und unsere Templer Philosophie.

Ohne Zuwachs von außen ist es zweifelhaft ob wir uns auf die Dauer als lebensfähige Organisation behaupten können. Etwas Lebendiges muß wachsen, muss zum Wachstum befähigt sein. Das verlangt die Natur, sie verlangt es von allem was da Lebensraum einnimmt. Die Idee des Tempels sollte nicht, wie im Ruhestand, nur vegetieren - und, gleich einer Altenfürsorge, auf staatliche Unterstützung angewiesen sein. Sie muss aktiv wirken, muss vorbildlich da stehen und für jedermann verständlich sein. So tut es Not, deshalb müssen wir zu-sehen, daß wir Anderen begreiflich machen warum es gut ist ein Templer zu sein. Sie sollen sehen daß der Templer Glaube, die Templer Lebensphilosophie anstrebenswert ist und zur Besserung der Zustände auf Erden führen kann. Solange wir immer nur inwärts schauen, werden wir die Schranken nicht los die unser Wachstum hemmen. Laßt uns auch hier die ererbten Dogmas abwerfen, den Stacheldraht beseitigen und den Blick in die Zukunft richten. Ich sage es wieder, alle Menschen sind Templer, nur wissen das manche noch nicht. Laßt uns es ihnen sagen! - Aber wie? Somit zurück zur kritischen Selbstbetrachtung:

In dem Templer Handbuch, herausgegeben von Peter Lange, ist unter "Wer wir sind" eine Kurz-Beschreibung der Tempelgesellschaft in zehn Punkten: (hier dem Sinne nach wiedergegeben)

- a. Wir sind eine frei-christlich-religiöse Gemeinschaft
- b. Das Wort Tempel in unserem Namen bezieht sich auf Stellen des Neuen Testaments, in denen vom Bau eines geistigen Tempels die Rede ist..

- c. Unser Leitwort heißt: "Trachtet nach dem Reich Gottes und nach seiner Gerechtigkeit"
 - i. Unser Glaube lebt in der Gewißheit daß alle Menschen zu diesem Reich berufen sind.
 - ii. Mitglied wird man in persönlicher Willensentscheidung
 - iii. Als Bekenntnis verlangen wir nichts als Zustimmung zu dem im Leitwort gewiesenen Ziel.
- d. Wir berufen uns auf Jesus von Nazareth und sein Vertrauen zu Gott, verwirklicht in grenzenloser Nächstenliebe.
- e. Wir betrachten die Bibel als eine Fundgrube menschlicher Erkenntnis.
- f. Unser 'Streben miteinander und Wirken füreinander' kann sich am besten im Sinne eines geistigen oder materiellen Gemeindelebens bewähren.
- g. Unsere Gemeinschaft ist seit ihrem Ursprung um 1850 in steter Entwicklung und wird sich auch weiterhin herausbilden.
- h. Unser Gottesdienst ist eine Zeit der Andacht und der geistigen Erfrischung. Es gibt keine Kulthandlungen von sakraler Bedeutung.
- i. Die geistige Führung der Gemeinde wird von Mitgliedern der Gemeinde im Ältestendienst betreut.

Ist unsere Religion vollständig? Messen wir richtig die Güter der Erde? - Religion, wie auch alle anderen Felder der Wissenschaft, hat kein absolutes Maß. Ich hörte unlängst einer Debatte zu, wo über Health Care gesprochen wurde. Der Vorsitzende legte die Frage auf, 'seit Jahrzehnten wird über dies oder das Care System gestritten, Millionen von Dollars investiert in Änderungen und immer noch beklagen sich die Leute; wenn werden wir endlich einmal eine perfekte Lebensführsorge haben die uns allen paßt?' Die Antwort die er bekam war verblüffend, nie! kurz und bündig, never! - Es gibt keinen Heiligen Gral hier, sagte der Vertreter vom Department, keine absolute Wertung die allen Ansprüchen, auf alle Zeit gerecht sein kann. - Ganz gleich sehe ich auch die Religion. Was vor hundert Jahren sonnenklare Tatsache war, ist heute bestenfalls umstritten oder gar als falsch abgelehnt. Das heißt, es gibt keine absolute Religion, keine perfekte Religion die für alle Zeiten paßt, es sei den sie wird künstlich bewacht, steht unter Natur oder historischem Schutz, oder sie macht sich ihren eigenen Maßstab, wie es die Katholische Kirche eine Zeit lang getan hat.

Im Vergleich zum Fortschritt in der Wissenschaft und der Technik sind wir Templer stehen geblieben, während andere Religionen, insbesondere die Umgangs-Katholische, ihren Mitgliedern heute große Konzessionen macht. Und so fürchte ich, daß wir Templer nicht mehr an fortschrittlich-führenden Stelle stehen wie einst. Vor 150 Jahren war Hoffmann ein Rebell in religiösen Kreisen, heute wäre er es, mit seiner damaligen Gesinnung nicht mehr. Das ist was ich damit sagen will. Wir sind bei seiner Anschauung stehen geblieben. Bei seiner damalig visionären Auslegung der biblischen Offenbarung von dem neuen Jerusalem, indem es keine Kirchen und keine Tempelgebäude mehr geben wird, weil die Menschen die Tempel sind, und der Geist Gottes im Menschen wohnt.

Dieser Botschaft haben wir wohl oberflächlich Folge geleistet, aber sie nie

in ihrer vollen Auslegung, mit allen Implikationen angenommen. Unsere Folgeleistung hat sich eingebürgert in der Art wie und wo wir unsere Gottesdienste abhalten. Das ist nicht genug. Gottes Geist müssen wir verwirklicht sehen in jedem Menschen. Nicht nur in denen die guten Willens sind! Jeder Mensch ist ein Tempel Gottes. Unser Nachbar ist das Gottes-Ähnlichste das wir in unserem ganzen Leben je erleben werden. Auf Gott bauen heißt nichts anderes, es kann nichts anders heißen, als deinem Nächsten trauen. Wer da sagt er liebe Gott doch traut nicht seinem Nachbarn, spricht Unsinn. Es ist untrennbar das selbe. Gott ist gegenwärtig wo-immer Menschen zusammenkommen und wird sie nach Besserem streben lassen. Deshalb brauchen wir dazu keine speziellen Räume oder Heiligtümer, wie Jesu so schön sagt in Matthias 18:20, 'sowie zwei oder drei Leute in meinem Namen zusammen kommen werde ich unter ihnen sein'. Und wo wir Gebäude errichten zu diesem Zweck ist es lediglich zum Schutz vor den Elementen. Es ist der Geist der Gemeinschaft der diese Stätte heiligt, so wie hier in Boronia, und nicht die Abbilder von biblischen Figuren oder dem Leiden Jesu.

Wir Templer haben wohl Jesu als Mensch akzeptiert. Seine Auferstehung als bildlich anstatt wörtlich und seine Wunder als natürlich ausgelegt. Doch noch 1978 sagt Richard Hoffmann daß er befürchte, "in der neuerdings propagierten Vermenschlichung Jesus spiele menschliche Arroganz mit, sowohl als ein Mangel an kritischer Selbstbeurteilung". (Siehe Peter Langes Templer Handbuch, Seite 131.) Ja, bestimmt laufen wir Gefahr, Jesus als Mensch auch, sozusagen menschlich zu kritisieren. Aber, sehen wir das heute noch als überheblich an? Jesus, als Mensch seiner Zeit betrachtet, konnte unmöglich wissen was die heutige Forschung als Tatsache in der Schule lehrt. Das ist nicht Arroganz, und soll in keiner Weise den Einfluß den Jesus auf seine damalige Zeit hatte, unterschätzen. Das heißt, damals. Wir wissen heute daß 6,000 Millionen Menschen die Erde bevölkern, die in Gottes Natur alle die selben Rechte haben, wir wissen wie unscheinbar klein die Erde ist - mitsamt ihrer billionenfachen lebendigen Last - im Verhältnis zum Universum. Menschen haben den Erdball im Weltraum gesehen, wie er, ein Planet der Sonne im Weltall schwebt, frei von Himmel und Hölle nur von der Schwerkraft der Natur in seiner Kreis-Bahn geführt. Astronauten sind auf dem Mond gestanden und haben die Erde am Himmel bestaunt, in ihrer ganzen Schönheit photographiert und unsere Schulkinder damit begeistert.

Jesus wußte das nicht. Deshalb sollten auch seine anderen Auslegungen im Lichte ihrer Zeit gesehen sein. Wir müssen uns daran erinnern, daß zum Beispiel der Zweck des Blutkreislaufs im Menschen erst im Zeitalter der Chemie entdeckt wurde, und die Vererbungslehre erst in 1865. Noch vor hundert Jahren wurde allen Ernstes debattiert ob Heiden eine Seele besitzen. So spricht Jesus oft in Parabeln die heute entweder nicht mehr aktuell sind oder gar mit technischer Erkenntnis einfach falsch. Wir müssen lernen sie weniger als Tatsachen anzuschauen sondern als Geschichten, erzählt vom Schriftsteller seinerzeit um Jesus lebensnah zu schildern.

Wenn ich im Folgenden zeigen will wie Jesu (oder der Erzähler) oft, wörtlich und - im Englischen gibt es hier den passenden Ausdruck - "out of Kontext"

genommen, falsch sein kann, so ist das nicht gedacht seiner phänomenalen Leistung oder seiner Einsicht Abbruch zu tun. Es soll ein Hinweis sein wie sich die Lebensverhältnisse in den 2,000 Jahren seit seiner Zeit drastisch geändert haben. Wir haben uns und unser Vorstellungsvermögen im Wandel der Zeit der neuen Umwelt angepaßt.

Wenn Paulus zum Gelähmten sagt: nimm dein Bett auf und wandle, und der Lahme, der zeit seines Lebens nicht gelaufen ist, steht auf und geht heim, so wissen wir heute daß so etwas biologisch unmöglich ist. Ebenso zeigt die heutige Erkenntnis daß Sehen nicht nur eine Sache des Auges ist. Jemand der seit Geburt blind ist, wie in der Johannesgeschichte Kapitel 9 erzählt wird, kann nicht sehen. Ein ausgewachsener Verstand hat nicht mehr die Fähigkeit Sehen von Grund auf zu erlernen, auch wenn das Auge geöffnet würde. Das menschliche Gehirn formiert sich in der Kindheit für unsere fünf Sinne. Ist innerhalb einer gewissen Zeitspanne nach der Geburt kein Gebrauch von einem der Sinne gemacht, durch Verletzung des Sinnorgans oder erbliche Belastung, so wird die ihm von Natur an-ermessene Mentalität von anderen Organen übernommen, und für immer verwachsen. Deshalb ist oft einer der überbleibenden Sinne weit besser als normal ausgebildet. Beim Sehen soll die Zeitspanne weniger als zwei Jahre sein. Bei Tieren oft nur Tage. Sogar die Fähigkeit die erste Sprache und Grammatik zu erlernen verliert man nach dem zehnten Lebensjahr.

Wir Templer stützen unsere Lebensphilosophie nicht auf die wörtliche Wahrheit biblischer Überlieferung. Sie hat wenig damit zu tun. Wir kennen das heilige Land, wir kennen seine Bevölkerung. Wir kennen ihre Neigung zum Phantastischen. Seit nahezu 150 Jahren sagen wir uns vor, daß Religion, unser Tempelglauben, in jeder Beziehung mit den Erkenntnissen der Wissenschaft zu vereinbaren sein muß. Christoph Hoffmann sagt es uns schon in Occident und Orient, unsere Vorväter lebten es in Palästina. Nur wir, von der lebendigen Realität des heiligen Landes getrennt, laufen Gefahr wieder der übertrieben einseitigen Sentimentalität der biblischen Schriften zu verfallen. Ob war oder erdichtet für Effekt, ist letzten Endes belanglos. Was sich mit den heutigen Verhältnissen, heutigem Wissen und heutiger Sozialphilosophie nicht vereinbaren läßt ist für uns schädlich. Eine Religion die blinden Glauben verlangt, das heißt glauben müssen was nicht mehr glaubhaft ist, gefährdet die Entwicklung einer Gemeinschaft.

Ein einfaches Beispiel wie man aufpassen muß. Im letzten Templer Record, in der Children Section, wird beschrieben wie der Gott Moses mit den Ägyptern rechtete. Wir alle kennen die Geschichte, wie durch göttliche Heimsuchung von Land und Leuten die Israeliten zu guter Letzt ihre Freiheit von Pharao erzwangen. So etwas muß man ab und zu bewußt lesen, muß sich das Geschehen verbildlichen in seinem ganzen Grauen: Pharao ist eigensinnig, er läßt die Israelischen Sklaven nicht gehen. Ein Allmächtiger Gott ist nicht im Stande, oder nicht gewillt, Pharaos Sinn selbst zu ändern. Warum nicht? Wie kommt es daß keiner fragt, warum denn nicht? So wird Geschichte gemacht. Die Parallele dazu findet man wieder und wieder in der Entwicklung der Menschheit, bis in die jüngste Vergangenheit. Lieber wird das Land verwüstet, die Tiere müssen elendig sterben, das

Wasser und die Fische verseucht, die Umwelt verschmutzt, schuldlose Kinder werden ermordet. All das um eines einzigen Menschen Willen zu brechen? Läßt sich das mit unserer heutigen Weltanschauung vereinbaren? Ist das eines gütigen, allmächtigen Schöpfers Wille? Wird so Gottes Liebe und Gerechtigkeit unseren Kindern beigebracht und unter den Menschen verbreitet?

Ich weiß, es ist eine Kindergeschichte, mit kindlichen Bildern für kindliche Vorstellungen. Und das ist genau was ich mit dem Beispiel zeigen wollte. Laßt uns die biblischen Geschichten sehen als das was sie wirklich sind: alte Erzählungen, die sehr oft nicht in unsere Zeit der sozialen Verantwortung, des Umweltschutzes, menschlichen Mitgefühls und technischem Wissens passen. Anstatt daß wir uns den Kopf zerbrechen wie es nun möglich war, daß Wasser zu Blut wurde, oder Stäbe sich in Schlangen verwandelten, lasset uns lieber planen wie wir alle die Wunder der neuen Wissenschaft und Technik für das Wohl der Menschheit, und insbesondere für die Weiterentwicklung unserer Tempelgesellschaft nützen können. Unser Wissen bringt eine Verpflichtung mit sich, dieses Wissen weiterzugeben und nutzbringend anzuwenden..

Im Vergleich zu dem was in Jesus Zeiten technisch möglich war, mit Stock, Stiefel und Esel, leben wir heute hier im Lande der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten, im Schlaraffenland. Wir essen und trinken nach Belieben. Nachrichten fliegen in Sekunden um die Welt. Tatsächlich sind es oft im wahren Sinne des Wortes gar keine "Nach"-richten mehr sondern, wie sie auch oft richtig benannt werden "life news". - Die Wissenschaft wird heute öfters beschuldigt sie würde den Menschen die Ehrfurcht vor Gott und der Natur nehmen. - Indem sie uns das Wundervolle technisch erklärt und begreiflich macht beraube man uns des Zaubers und der Romantik die wir an der Natur lieben. Der kontroverselle Autor Richard Dawkins hat tatsächlich ein Buch diesem Thema gewidmet indem er versucht zu zeigen, daß das Wunderbare an der Natur unendlich ist. Wenn die Wissenschaft uns das Natürliche in einem Wunder zeigt wird unser Horizont durch diese Einsicht vergrößert. Anstatt daß wir den ererbten Verlust bejammern, sollten wir unsere Erkenntnisse erweitern und weitere, weit größere Wunder darüber hinaus sehen. Das Buch heißt auf Englisch "Unweaving the Rainbow", soviel wie den Regenbogen erklären. - Wer hat nicht schon an einem frischen Regentag in Andacht vor einem tieffarbigen Regenbogen gestanden, seine satten Farben und seine übernatürliche Vollendung bewundert. In majestätischem Schwung bekränzt er Berg und Tal, verbindet Himmel und Erde und ist doch wie ein Hauch, unbeständig und ungreifbar. In der Schönheit seines Gewebes lockt uns die Natur zu einem Blick in ihre mathematische Struktur. Descartes löste im 17ten Jahrhundert das Rätsel der Struktur und Newton erklärte uns die Farben. Das Licht der Sonne zerfällt im Regentropfen in seine Bestandteile. Uns sichtbar sind Rot, Gelb, Grün, Blau und Violett. Hat dieses Verständnis dem Regenbogen etwas an Schönheit abgetan? Natürlich nicht! Und in dem Spektrum des Lichts finden wir heute Information die uns die Wunder der Sterne Millionen Lichtjahre entfernt lesen lassen. - Wenn uns im Konzert ein Mozart oder Beethovens adagio zu Tränen rührt, stört es uns in unserer Andacht zu wissen wie Musik gemacht oder übertragen wird? - Freuen wir uns über die Grazie einer Kathedrale oder einer schön geschwungenen

Brücke weniger weil wir wissen sie wurden mit Hilfe eines Baugerüsts erstellt? Natürlich nicht! Im Gegenteil, wir bestaunen neben der Kunst im Bau noch die Gottesgabe in der Kunstfertigkeit der menschlichen Meister. -

Indem wir Religion und Natur als natürlich ansehen, wird jede technologische Erklärung eines wundervollen Geheimnisses zu einer Tür in eine noch geheimnisvollere Welt. In jeder Antwort die wir finden ist zugleich eine Challenge an unseren Intellekt neue Fragen zu schaffen. So wachsen Wissen und Religion Hand in Hand in Gottes Nahmen.

Wir haben heutzutage genug zum Leben, wir brauchen uns nicht für den morgigen Tag zu sorgen und wir leben in Frieden mit unserem Nachbarn. Ist dies nicht das Reich Gottes auf Erden? Weshalb ist dann unser Bewußtsein mit all dem nicht zufrieden? Jesus spricht einmal mit einem reichen Mann der guten Willens ist, (Matthäus 19:16) der zeitlebens die Gebote alle befolgt hat und doch fühlt daß noch etwas fehlt seinem Leben Sinn zu geben. Er sagt zu Jesus, ich bin ein wahrer Mann, mir ist die Ehe und das Leben heilig, ich stehle nicht, ich ehre Vater und Mutter. Herr, was mehr muss ich tun um Glückseligkeit zu erlangen?

Die Antwort die Jesus ihm gibt ist enttäuschend und ist nicht mit irdischer Realität vereinbar: 'Gib alles was du hast her, verteile es unter den Armen und folge mir nach!' - Zu oft schon, denke ich, ist dieser Spruch als Allheilmittel angepriesen worden für Erdenverdruss und Ideenarmut und verlockt immer wieder Menschen zu verantwortlosem Nichtstun: 'Wenn ich nichts hab bin ich für nichts verantwortlich', sagt sich der, 'und wenn es mir dann nicht gut geht so sind andere daran schuld'. Aber Seligkeit, nein das erlangt man dadurch nicht. Seligkeit kann man nicht erkaufen, weder mit Spenden noch mit Opfer, noch mit Nichtstun, sie muss verdient sein, jeden Tag auf's Neue. Der Mensch findet seine Seligkeit in Arbeit, in der Verwirklichung seiner Ideen, in dem was er tut, für seinen Mitmenschen, für die Gemeinde, für die Umwelt. Egal wie reich oder wie arm er ist. - Dieselbe Begehung findet sich, nota bene, auch - mit kleinen Änderungen - in den Evangelien von Markus und Lukas.

Hier sehen wir wieder wie Jesus ein Mensch seiner Zeit war und wir müssen uns entscheiden, ob wir mit ihm die Erde und unsere herrliche Welt des Lebens, der Liebe und der Freude, nur als eine Art Probezeit der Selbstverneinung für das Jenseits ansehen wollen, oder ob wir in einer Verwirklichung besserer Zustände auf Erden teilnehmen können. Ich denke, Ich hoffe, wir Templer haben diese Entscheidung längst getroffen in dem wir den obigen Leitspruch von Christoph Hoffmann aufgegriffen haben. Aber weit mehr aktiv könnten wir sein, müßten wir sein, individuell und als Gesellschaft, in der Verpflichtung die mit diesem Wissen kommt. Ob die biblische Auferstehung bildlich oder wörtlich zu nehmen ist, mag uns wohl keine Kopfzerbrechen bereiten. Ich gehe so weit zu sagen, sie wird heut-zu-tage - nicht nur bei uns sondern an vielen Stellen - mehr als eine greifbare Darstellung vom Fortleben einer Idee angesehen; ein Beweis wie der Sinn einer Idee körperlos weiterexistieren kann, sich unbewußt verbreitet und dann in artverwandten Menschengedanken wieder Fuß faßt. Richard Dawkins, der neben dem obengenannten "Unweaving of the Rainbow" auch die Bücher "the blind Watchmaker", "the Selfish Gene", und andere schrieb, hat das Wort "Meme"

geprägt für eben solche Gedanken-Fragmente, - wohl in Anlehnung an das Wort Gene, das für körperliche Erbanlagen steht. Daß solche Gedanken Fragmente tatsächlich unabhängig von ihrem Kreator leben können, sich sogar vermehren, ist wie ein Wunder, eine Art geistiger Fortpflanzung. So ist die Auferstehung als ein Erwachen der Idee Jesus in seinen Jüngern zu sehen, wie die Apostel auf einmal selbst zu der Gewißheit seiner Lebensphilosophie kamen, und von seiner Richtigkeit überzeugt waren. Solche neue Einsichten, solche Tatsachen sollten mehr verbreitet werden und in dieser Aufgabe zeigen wir in der Tempelgesellschaft die Trägheit, die in Jahren geistiger Zufriedenheit die Entschlußkräfte lähmt.

Leben ist nicht ein Hände-in-den Schoß legen und geduldig der damals prophezeiten Erlösung warten. In Hoffmanns Aufruf "Trachtet" liegt meines Erachtens mehr als eine Mahnung daran zu denken, das Wort enthält eine Challenge zur freudigen Arbeit an einer besseren Society. - Mir fällt da eine Geschichte ein die wohl nicht aus der Bibel stammt, aber es sein könnte:

Ein alter Vater hatte zwei Söhne und einen Weinberg. Die Söhne hatten den Sinn von Arbeit in ihrem jugendlichen Leichtsinn noch nicht erfasst. Sie arbeiteten wenn sie unbedingt mußten. Der Vater sorgte für das tägliche Brot und bewahrte sie vom Übel. Doch mit der Zeit wurde er altersschwach und kam der vielen Arbeit in seinem Weinberg alleine nicht mehr nach. Der Acker vergraste, der Boden wurde steinhart und die Trauben verkümmerten. Als dann eines Tages der Vater am Sterben lag, rief er seine beiden Söhne zu sich und sagte, alles was ich euch zu vermachen habe ist der Weinberg, teilt ihn unter euch brüderlich. Der Weinberg? Riefen die beiden Söhne, der trägt doch nichts und ist ohnehin verschuldet! Mit seinen letzten Atemzügen flüsterte der Vater, 'aber in unserem Weinberg liegt ein Schatz'. 'Wo?, Vater, wo?', riefen die Söhne miteinander, wo im Weinberg ist der Schatz vergraben?' 'Grabt nur, grabt...' war alles was der alte Greis noch sagen konnte und dann starb er.

Mit Hacke und Schaufel gingen die Beiden sofort daran und gruben und gruben. Sie gruben im Acker zwischen jeder Traubenstockreihe auf und ab. Sie gruben wochenlang, und sie fanden - nichts. Kein Gold, kein Silber und keine Juwelen. Der Ältere warf schließlich die Schaufel weg und sagte ärgerlich, ich hab mir's doch gleich gedacht, es ist nichts da, an der Nase hat der Alte uns herumgeführt. Mach was du willst, der Acker und die Schulden sind dein, ich gehe in die weite Welt. Der Junge aber sah traurig sich den verwüsteten Acker an und begann ihn sorgfältig und liebevoll wieder zu ebnen. Mit Tränen in den Augen und Schweiß auf der Stirne häufte er alle die Stöcke an, so wie er es den Vater hatte tun sehen. Er arbeitete und arbeitete und er fand Freude in der Arbeit. Und siehe da, im nächsten Frühling sprossen die alten Weinstöcke mit neuer Lebenskraft die sie in dem bearbeiteten lockeren Boden in Hülle und Fülle fanden. Eine reiche Ernte brachte der Herbst, und vom Erlös konnte der junge Sohn alle Schulden abzahlen. Jetzt erst verstand er des Vaters letzte Worte: In dem Weinberg liegt ein Schatz.

Trachtet, sagte Christoph Hoffmann. Suchen wir vergeblich nach einem versteckten Schatz, wo er doch klar und offen vor uns liegt? Fragen wir nach einer Erklärung - verlangen eine Garantie ehe wir etwas tun - wenn nur wagende

Zuversicht Erlösung bringt? Christoph Hoffmann legte den Grundstein unseres Tempels. Er hat uns nicht einen fertigen Tempel gegeben, sondern er hat uns gezeigte wie man baut. Im Bauen, im Ändern, im Schaffen, im Geben von dem Besten zu dem wir fähig sind, liegt unsere Befriedigung und die Seligkeit. Er gab uns den Schlüssel der das Tor zum Unbegreiflichen öffnet, und uns die Freiheit des Denkens und des Glaubens gewährt. Durch ihn ist unser Glaube heute nicht mehr ein blindes Glauben an eine absolute Seligkeit. Doch diese Freiheit des Denkens bringt, wie jede andere Freiheit das auch tut, mit sich die Selbstverantwortung, die Aufgabe sie nutzbringend zu verwenden.

Freiheit verpflichtet. Die Freiheit des Denkens verpflichtet uns zum Denken. Es gibt keine Freiheit die absolut ist. Freiheit ändert nicht das was zu tun ist, sie ändert nur das - Müssen - zum - Wollen. Wir haben die Freiheit zum Trachten und zum Streben. Und hier werden wir uns des ganzen tiefen Konflikts bewußt der in der Geschichte der Menschheit verkörpert ist, der immer wieder zum Vorschein kommt, auf dem die meisten Argumente fußen: Weiß ich eigentlich was ich will, nach was ich strebe?

Laßt uns beten.

Laßt uns beten, im Vertrauen zu Gott dessen Geist in uns und in unserem Nachbar lebt und der uns zu Tempel Gottes, zu Tempel, macht: Lieber Gott wir danken dir, daß wir uns des Lichts des Tages freuen dürfen. Wir danken dir für die Sonne die uns wärmt und die Nacht die uns kühlt und uns die Ruhe bringt, für den Regen der die Erde erfrischt und den Wind der die Wolken vertreibt. Hilf uns erkennen daß Liebe und Leid, Freude und Schmerz, Tag und Nacht Stufen natürlicher Entwicklung sind, die unserem Streben nach Wahrheit und Klarheit, und nach deiner Gerechtigkeit die nötige Einsicht schaffen.

Amen

Wir enden die heutige Sonntagsfeier mit unserem Losungslied: "Trachtet ruft mit erstem W orte" Verse 1 & 9 (nach dem hohen Ziele richte). Bitte bleiben sie danach noch und hören Monika Frank zu.

Abschluß Musik □

BORONIA SAAL 10 DECEMBER 2000

Music Veronika van Krieken.

Text: TS Religious Perspective, Item 2c Kingdom of God;

Reader: Stephan Klingbeil

Lied zu Beginn: Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte...No. 127 in the TH

Lied zum Abschluss: Nun Danket alle Gott... No. 75 in the Templer Hymnbook

Guten Morgen allerseits, und Willkommen zu unserem Saal am zweiten Advent Sonntag. Veronika van Krieken wird uns jetzt mit einem Prélude in die sonntagliche Stimmung bringen.

Musical prelude:

Der Saal in Boronia wird traditionell auf Deutsch gehalten und wir wollen das auch heute tun, but I will present some summaries in English for those that are more at home in that tongue.

Wir fangen an mit dem Choral "Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte...", Nummer 127 in unserem schönen, neuen Templer Hymnbook, Verse 1,2 & 3.

Auf der Suche nach einem Text für heute habe ich mir die neue gemeinsame Glaubenserklärung, the "Religiöse Perspektive", der Tempelgesellschaft vorgenommen. Jeder von Euch wird inzwischen dieses kleine Büchlein erhalten haben und manch einer hat vielleicht schon nachgeschaut ob es tatsächlich möglich ist die ziemlich lose Templerphilosophie in verständlichen Worten zusammenzufassen.

Wie Dietrich Ruff im Vorwort sagt, ist diese Erklärung unseres Glaubensbildes kein strenges Glaubensbekenntnis, sondern soll als Orientierungshilfe für die eigenen Mitgliedern dienen, sowie ein Ausgangspunkt sein zum Meinungsaustausch mit anderen Konfessionen. Sie ist sachlich gefaßt und soll die praktische Glaubensauffassung der Templer widerspiegeln und für neue Einsichten und Erfahrungen offen sein.

Ich habe die Definition von dem Reich Gottes daraus als unser Thema für heute genommen. Das Reich Gottes einmal, weil es als Zentralpunkt unserer Religion beim Templer Seminar vor sechs Wochen auf dem Mt Buller, eingehend besprochen wurde, und dann wieder weil mich Gedanken über die Philosophie des Reiches Gottes, als sozialer Lebensstandard gesehen, schon länger beschäftigen. Es freut mich, dass Stephan Klingbeil heute bei uns ist und diesen Text vorlesen kann. Stephan ist der Sohn von Jörg und Karin Klingbeil aus Deutschland und ist hier für ein paar Monate als Templer Exchange Student. Er kann zur Zeit bei Dieter und Traude Glenk in Montrose erreicht werden.

Soweit das Reich Gottes unserer "Religious Perspective". In diesem gemeinsamen 'Glaube und Selbstverständnis der Templer ist diese Definition ein Versuch unser Templer Leitmotive, den Bibelspruch Matthäus 6: 33, in andere Worte zu fassen. Worte die etwas weniger biblisch, weniger abstrakt klingen und mehr leb-

ensnah sind, Worte die mehr irdische Realität enthalten.-- Doch auch darin sind wieder Begriffe enthalten die meines Erachtens weiterer Klärung bedürfen: So wie 'die Vervollkommnung des Menschen' und, 'im göttlichen Auftrag, das Ziel'. Beides sind Ausdrücke die mit heutigen Wissen nach weiterer Definition verlangen.

Was verstehen wir unter 'Vervollkommnung des Menschen' und was ist das 'gottgegebene Ziel'. Ich will versuchen hier meine Gedanken dazu geben. Zuerst noch eine Betrachtung, ein Beispiel warum so eine Überholung, eine Revision der Selbstverständnis Erklärung, ab und zu nötig ist um die philosophische Entwicklung einer weit verstreuten Gemeinde, wie wir es sind, ziel- und zeitgerecht zu lenken. Wer die November Warte des Tempels gelesen hat, hat sicher den Artikel von Peter Lange über die Temple Church in Amerika gesehen. Es gibt dort bei Gypsum, Kansas, tatsächlich noch Leute deren religiöse Philosophie von Christoph Hoffmann abstammt. Ursprünglich Tempelfeld genannt, feierte diese Gemeinde 1986 ihr 100 jähriges Jubiläum. Christoph Hoffmann besuchte 1881 Amerika und sprach bei Konferenzen in Buffalo, Schenectady und Neu York wobei er sehr auf richtige Gemeindebildung drängte.

Etliche Versuche dazu scheiterten über die Jahre, und der Erfolg in Palästina lockte viele der Amerikanischen Mitglieder zum Übersiedeln nach Haifa. In Amerika ist die einzige noch heute bestehende Gruppe die von Gypsum. Aber wenngleich sich die Mitglieder dieser Kirche auch heute noch auf die templerischen Anfänge ihrer Gemeinde berufen, können wir sie nicht mehr als geistesverwandt ansehen und wohl nicht mal als Templerfreunde bezeichnen. Aus ihrer Glaubenserklärung, ihrem "Statement of Faith", sehen wir wie sehr sie in ihrer Entwicklung in ein anderes Fahrwasser geraten sind.

Ihre 12 Glaubensartikel sind mit unserem neuen Philosophy Statement gar nicht mehr zu vergleichen. Sie betrachten die Bibel als wort-wörtlich korrekt, als fehler- und irrtumsfrei; Jesus als Sohn Gottes sündenlos und leiblich auf-erstanden; sie glauben sowohl an die ewige Seligkeit als auch an Verdammnis. "So", sagt Peter Lange, "so bleibt die Temple Church in Gypsum für uns lediglich noch ein Anstoß, uns den Glaubensmut und die Glaubenskraft einer längst vergangenen Zeit vor Augen zu führen."

Ich möchte hier etwas von diesem Glaubensmut der damaligen Templer vorlesen, aus einem Buch das mir Reinhold Orth auslieh über die Geschichte von Hohenhaslach. Es steht da genau beschrieben wie im Gasthaus zum Waldhorn in Ludwigsburg im Jahre 1854 sich an de 200 Männer versammelten, und unter der Führung von Christoph Hoffmann und Georg Hardegg die Gemeinschaft der 'Freunde Jerusalems' gründeten. Man liest dann weiter: (Seite 134) *'Angetrieben durch die wirtschaftliche Not und den Druck der Kirche entschloß sich diese Gruppe zur Auswanderung nach Palästina. Trotz widriger Umstände wurden Dörfer, oder Kolonien wie sie die Templer nannten, gegründet die recht gut gediehen. Durch Werbung in der alten Heimat zogen immer mehr Gleichgesinnte nach. In der Landespost Nr. 93 von 1875 findet man eine Einladung zu einer Versammlung in Niederhaslach bei der der Vorsteher der Templer, Christoph Hoffmann, spricht,*

was für Alle die an Mission und Kolonisation im Heiligen Land interessiert sind, von Wichtigkeit sein dürfte.'

Die Veranstaltung hat ihre Wirkung nicht verfehlt. In den nächsten Jahren zogen viele Haslacher nach Palästina aus, darunter Notz, Orth, Löbert, Scheerle, Jung, Grözinger, Weiß, Weiberle und Weber. Der Abschnitt endet mit: *'Heute noch leben viele Nachfahren der Hohenhaslacher Auswanderer im fernen Australien in einer festen Glaubensgemeinschaft'*.

Das Buch ist sehr schön geschrieben und illustriert. Interessant ist dazu, dass im Verzeichnis der gesamten Auswanderer im 19. Jahrhundert, nahezu 100 Namen angeführt sind die nach Amerika zogen. Für Leute die an der Geschichte der Amerikanischen Temple Church interessiert sind hat es in unserem Archive etliche Schriften über die Amerikanischen Templer und auch Berichte über beiderseitige Besuche und Festlichkeiten.

Warum ich hier diese Geschichte erzähle ist, weil sie zeigt wie schnell Ideen auseinander wachsen können wenn nicht gemeinsam gearbeitet wird; wenn man nicht ab und zu zusammen kommt und Gedanken austauscht. Wie ich von anderer Seite gehört habe, haben Leiter der Amerikanischen Gruppen zu Beginn wiederholt um geistliche Hilfe in Person von den Templern in Deutschland und in Palästina gebeten, doch es blieb bei dem einen Besuch von Hoffmann. Ich hoffe, dass eine gemeinsame Revision dieses Heftes nicht wieder 50 Jahre auf sich warten läßt.

Natürlich wurde auch beim Mt Buller Seminar das Thema des Ziels der Tempel Gesellschaft, das Reich Gottes, eifrig debattiert. An den 30 Personen machten mit. Ein paar Stunden Diskussion und dann Wanderungen, in der schönen Landschaft und der frisch-klaren Bergesluft. Sogar Schnee hatten wir in der ersten Nacht. Eine der Fragen die während dem Seminar behandelt wurden, war eben dieses Problem der unterschiedlichen, religiösen Entwicklung in zwei intellektuell getrennten Gebieten. Angenommen beide arbeiten auf ein Reich Gottes zu, ihre Ideale und Methoden sind aber verschieden. Wie läßt sich das mit der Idee vom perfekten Reich Gottes vereinbaren? Kann es zwei Reiche Gottes geben auf Erden? Oder hundert? Gibt es Millionen Wege des Werdens, für jeden Menschen einen, die zu dem angestrebten irdischen Idealzustand führen? Wenn nein, wer kann dann mit Bestimmtheit sagen welcher Weg der richtige ist? Wenn ja, dann sieht ja die Welt des Königreiches nicht anders aus als sie es jetzt ist, wo jeder auf seine eigene Art selig wird. Gibt es überhaupt einen absoluten richtigen Weg oder ein definierbares Ziel in dem sich alle einig sind?

Trotz der selben Basis und dem selben angestrebten Ziel hat sich die Temple Church in Gypsum ganz anders entwickelt als wir. Sie sind zurück auf die religiöse Dogmatik verfallen, in der, in menschlicher Unzulänglichkeit, Seligkeit vorbestimmt ist. Sie haben aus dem Streben nach dem Reich Gottes wieder ein Wort auf die Wiederkehr Jesus gemacht, was sehr wahrscheinlich auch die Original Idee von Hoffmann war, bevor sich etliche seiner (Hoffmanns) und Hardeggs Prophezeiungen als falsch erwiesen. Sie haben dafür den Rückhalt gewonnen den die Bibel ihrer Organisation leiht. Glauben macht selig. Solch ein

Glauben ist eine sehr verlockende Lebensauffassung: Der Verantwortung, dem Stress der Selbstentscheidung enthoben und in Glaube, Hoffnung und Erwartung in den Tag hinein leben. Es ist eine Philosophie die nicht nur frei macht, Freiheit von Sorgen und Kummer, sondern dazu klipp und klar Erlösung und Seligkeit verspricht. Wie vorsichtig man mit solchen Worten umgehen muß sehen wir auch näher zu Zuhause: "...wir glauben, dass Gott seine Schöpfung auf ihrem Weg durch die Zeit begleitet, dass er in seiner Schöpfung wirkt und unser Geschick bestimmt. Und weil wir uns in Gott geborgen wissen, und weil wir Vertrauen in das Leben haben, deshalb können wir ohne Angst leben und arbeiten: frei von der ständigen Sorge um das Sein, der Sorge um Nahrung, Kleidung und Behausung, der beständigen Angst um Leib und Leben. Weil wir uns in Gott geborgen wissen, können wir getrost dem morgigen Tag entgegensehen..." Dies sind nicht amerikanische Temple Church Worte. So beschreibt Otto Hammer in der November Warte unter "Nach dem hohen Ziel", unser Trachten nach dem Reich Gottes.

Mit solch einer Lebensanschauung kann man sehr leicht wieder in das breite Fahrwasser rutschen, wo alle Verantwortung für sich selbst, für die Umwelt und für die Zukunft von einem genommen wird, als Entgelt für den absoluten Glauben. Wir hier sind nicht unschuldig. Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte sangen wir mit Herzenslust zu Beginn dieser Stunde, und wir staunen mit kindlichem Gemüte in die Fülle der Natur und danken Gott für die Wunder die der Allmächtige für uns bereitet hat. Groß ist der Herr, Großer Gott wir loben dich, was Gott tut das ist wohlgetan, alles sind Anfänge von bekannten Chorälen mit denen wir Menschen versuchen Gott zu preisen. Auch einer Religion muß man das Wachsen und Reifen erlauben

Wir sehen heut-zutage, durch Wissenschaft und Technik bereichert, viele der biblischen Wunder als natürlich an. Unser Denken hat sich entwickelt. Um nicht dogmatisch zu werden muss eine Religion lebendig sein, muß neue Erkenntnisse und Lebensphilosophie in ihre Formen mit einbegreifen. Und deshalb ist es wichtig, ab und zu wieder gemeinsam eine "Glaube und Selbstverständnis Philosophie" zu reformieren, um den neuen Erkenntnissen Rechnung zu tragen. Im neuen Templer Hymnbook sind nur noch wenige der 165 Choräle von der fünften Auflage des schwarzen Templer Gesangbuchs vertreten. Und selbst diese tragen, wie Christoph Paulus so schön im Vorwort zur ersten Auflage in 1889 sagt, das Gepräge ihrer Zeit. Robert Funk, in seinen 21 Thesen zur religiösen Revolution geht soweit dass er sagt, dass mit heutigem Wissen Gott zu bitten, ja selbst Ihn zu preisen sei eine göttliche Beleidigung. Damit setzten wir seiner natürlichen Allmacht menschliche Grenzen, wo doch die ganze Erde mit all ihren Wundern, unser Sonnensystem und das ganze Weltall selbst seiner Absicht entsprangen.

Sachlich überlegt sind Gottes Taten alles Wunder. Sie müssen es sein. Was immer er erschuf war einzigartig, original und perfekt. Was immer er tut ist fertig, ist wunderbar und ist vollendet. Gott ist der Anfang und, wo Zeit und Ewigkeit sich treffen, zugleich das Ende aller Dinge. Er bildete das Licht aus der Mutter Nacht, das nun den Rang und Ruf ihr streitig macht, Er schuf die Sonne und setzte sie auf ihre Bahn. Er schuf die Erde und teilte das Wasser von dem Land, er machte den Wind und gab uns den Atem. Er machte sowohl das Gute als auch das

Böse; das Leben und den Tod. - Und was Gott tut das ist wohl getan; Gott ist kein Handmann der dauernd Arbeiten lenken und reparieren muß. Er führt nicht tagtäglich die Sonn' aus ihrem Zelt, er leitet nicht jedes Wasser vom Fels zum Meer, jede Wolke vom Meer aufs Land. Er weckt nicht die Vogelschaar in der Frühe zur fröhlichen Morgenandacht, und er zündet nicht des nachts die Sterne am Firmament.

Er hat das alles wunderbar bereitet in seinem göttlichen Plan. Die Sonne kommt und leuchtet, und lacht uns von ferne, und ihre vorgeschrieb'ne Reise vollendet sie mit Donnergang, sagt der Dichter mit poetischer Freiheit. Was Gott erschaffen hat das läuft von selbst, auf seiner natürlichen Bahn. Ob Mensch oder Stern.

Harald Ruff in his Community Afternoon Saal in Bayswater, on the subject of the Kingdom of God, cited Christoph Hoffmann from page 44 of the English translation of 'Occident and Orient': 'The Temple Society is not concerned with names and definitions. Rather it wants to help people gain an insight into the nature of the kingdom of God...' Consider the implications of what Jesus did say when asked "When will the kingdom of God come?" He answered, "You cannot tell by observation when the kingdom of God comes. There will be no sign saying, 'Look, here it is' or 'there it is', for in fact, the kingdom of God is amongst you." What he is saying in other words is, the kingdom will not have any supernatural signs, nothing that will outwardly differentiate it from our existing society. Think of it! If we can not tell where it is and which way, then what? What does this tell us?

It provides us with a dilemma. Can you promote an idea of something revolutionary new with a statement that everything will be the same as it is now? Of course not, because you won't be able to tell the difference. No wonder the Apostle Paul put the whole idea into the distant future and hid it behind an overall cleansing process of humanity in the Armageddon. That makes things so much easier. The annoying necessity to bring it about yourself, by your effort, your action, your decision, is taken from you, Jesus will do that when He comes back at the end of time. Even Hoffmann's Ideas can be interpreted in this way, highlighted by the before mentioned Temple Church. All you have to do is be baptised, confess to your inequities, have a Christian burial and in due time this identification badge will guarantee that you will be part of the eternal Kingdom.

Life is not meant to be that easy. We have learned that from Nature. Christoph Hoffmann also urged us to study the nature of the Kingdom of God, and Templers have turned their attention to the present, asking at last the question, why can the state of bliss Jesus tried to picture to his followers, 2000 years ago, not be realised in this world? By Man? With all the resources of this Earth at our disposal, with 2000 years of recorded history to look back on, surely we must come up with an answer. We have the tools, we are the tools, to implement Jesus' vision in our time. Because for us humans on this Earth life is a journey, and the journey is more important than the destination.

Ich kann die Folgerungen des Mt Buller Templer Seminars etwa so fassen:

Wir sehen das Reich Gottes nicht als ein unerklärlicher Idealzustand auf den wir zustreben sollen, nicht ein biblischer Himmel auf Erden, nicht ein Ziel das, wenn erreicht, uns wunderbar mit menschlicher Vollendung belohnt, sondern das Geschenk Gottes, das Reich Gottes, ist im Streben nach Besserem. Im Trachten danach, im gemeinsamen Tun, im gegenseitigen hilfreichen Ansporn liegt das Reich-tum das wir suchen. Deshalb kann es auch mehrere Königreiche geben, unendlich viele. Selbst die Art der Religion ist letzten Endes unwichtig, denn was die Menschen guten Willens vereint ist das Streben nach besseren Lebensbedingungen, und nicht das absolute Ziel. Auf diese Weise gesehen ist das Reich Gottes offensichtlich bereits unter uns. Siehe dich um, die Möglichkeiten der Besserung sind alletwegen, in unendlicher, gottgegebener Fülle. Es liegt an uns die leeren Worte von "besseren Zeiten" in konkrete Wirklichkeit zu versetzen. Gott hat uns die Vernunft und den Verstand gegeben von unserer Einsicht in die Gesetze der Natur besten Nutzen zu machen.

Eine bekannte Persönlichkeit wurde kürzlich gefragt, was sind die drei besten Wege den Lebensstandard eines Landes zu heben. Und die Antwort war, Grundschule, Hochschule und Universität. Nichts, aber auch Garnichts ist mit dem Erfolg zu vergleichen den ein wachsender Bildungsgrad einem Land gibt. Die Wissenschaft durchdringt alle menschlichen Talente, Technologie, Medizin, Literatur, Religion und sozial Fürsorge, und sogar Politik. Ja, der Bildungsgrad der Menschen eines Landes bestimmt sogar wie sich ein Volk regieren läßt. Es gibt dazu eine Formel: Wenn weniger als die Hälfte der Bevölkerung lesen und schreiben kann schafft eine Monarchie (oder Diktatur) am besten. Zwischen 50% und 90% Literacy ist der ideale Zustand für ein demokratisches System. Nähert sich der Prozentsatz jedoch hundert, so wird auch die Demokratie kraftlos und artet aus in ein leeres Schauspiel. Ein gutes Beispiel dafür sind die derzeitigen Präsident Wahlen in Amerika.

Eine radikal andre Art von Gouvernement muß sich mit der Zeit entwickeln, das ist jedem klar. Welche Form solch ein ideales Gouvernement haben wird beschäftigt die Philosophen schon seit 2000 Jahren. Und hier kommen wir zurück zum Reich Gottes. Ich persönlich sehe in der fortschreitenden Bildung der Allgemeinheit, im höheren Bewußtsein, die Anfangsbedingungen vom Reich Gottes. Dem Traum wo jeder Mensch sich verantwortungsvoll fühlt für seinen Mitmenschen und jedem andern Menschen trauen will. Der menschliche Verstand hat die wunderbare Gabe voraus zu denken und sich in andere Situationen zu versetzen. Viele sagen sogar, dass dies der Hauptgrund für unser relativ großes Gehirn sei. Es ist eine Gabe die durch allgemeine Bildung maximal effektiv werden kann. Verbunden mit einer Informationstechnologie die jeden Einzelnen erfaßt, wird dann jeder Einzelne sich der Folgen seines eigenen Tuns bewusst sein und wird von selbst Entscheidungen treffen die zum Wohl der Allgemeinheit beitragen. Er wird das tun weil er bewusst am Wohl der Gemeinde beteiligt ist, und weil sie sein eigenes Wohl bedingt.

Und so entsteht durch fortwährende höhere Bildung ein Gouvernement der aktiven Gerechtigkeit, die sich selbst regelt, ohne Zwang und ohne gesetzliche Drohung, als ob sie ein einziger Kopf regiere. Ein Reich Gottes auf Erden.

Lasset uns Gott danken.

Lieber Gott,

wir danken Dir für den Geist mit dem du uns beseelt hast. Wir danken Dir für unseren menschlichen Verstand mit dem wir uns an der Natur freuen können, und für die Weisheit in der Du uns die Möglichkeit gegeben hast Deine Wunder zu begreifen. Doch ganz besonders danken wir Dir für das Geschenk der Einsicht, mit unserem Nachbarn freundlich und in Frieden zu leben.

Amen

Jetzt singen wir noch miteinander den Choral "Nun Danket alle Gott..." Nummer 75 in dem roten Templer Hymnbook, oder Nummer 119 im schwarzen Gesangbuch, die Verse eins und zwei.

Und dann wird Veronika unseren Saal musikalisch ausklingen lassen.

Und nun sage ich euch allen Dankeschön für's Kommen und wünsche euch einen schönen Advent Sonntag. □

FOUNDER'S DAY SAAL IN BAYSWATER.

18 JUNE 2000 - AT 15:15

Music and Intro: Veronika van Krieken

Welcome to today's Founders' Day Service. To begin let us sing together our Losungslied "Trachtet ruft...." verses 1 and 2

Being Templers we honour our founders' memory every day. But one day each year is set aside in our calendar to express in words our appreciation for what they have achieved. For all they have done in preparing the social environment we are privileged to enjoy today. Our founders were a creative generation. Not only did they create a religious structure with freedom of intellectual and social expression, they also forged a community spirit around this religious core. I am not going to go into history today, for to me history is what we make of it. To me the important part of honouring the memory of the people gone before us, is a recognition of the trust those people have placed in us to carry on their work, and to ensure its continued relevance in the society of man.

In everyone's past there are milestones, landmarks and people that made history. People who stand out like beacons directing evolution towards the present social climate. Who are those people whom posterity rewards with such recognition? What makes them stand out from the rest? - The famous ball player Michael Jordan once said: "I have missed over 9,000 shots in my career, I have lost almost 300 games, I have failed over and over and over again in my life. That is why I succeed. I have failed my way to fame and success". Perhaps it is the determination, the vision and the commitment to that vision people like him bring to their tasks. Christoph Hoffmann did not set out on his Journey to Jerusalem with a prepossessed plan, nor a detailed road-map on how to get to the Kingdom of God, (no 'railway timetable' Dr Richard Hoffmann aptly called it in 1978). But he did have a vision of a better society, a society free from dogmatic beliefs and free from oppressive government interference. And he created it by trials and tribulations. The writings he has left us, are not a blueprint for his own work. They were written with the benefit of hindsight, with successful evolution protracted into the future. What he tried to do by his writings is to consolidate the Society's achievements and place it on a secure foundation, a base on which future generations could build. Through his writings he was hoping to underpin the still shaky structure of the young organisation and give direction to guided growth.

In these actions, in formulating guidelines for evolution, Christoph Hoffmann effectively held the young group together. He gave it a purpose. - But these very same actions also have the effect of suppressing diversity. Guidelines (once established) have a habit of becoming rules and dogmas. And worst of all, they have a tendency to outlive the environment that created them.

The text selected for today is from Luke 7 verses 31 to 35. In it Jesus replies to criticism, and bases such criticism on expectations of people who look for

instant results. Like children they live for the moment and see not the footsteps of evolution. Suspicion is their assessment of anything out of the ordinary and the only proof they recognise is what they understand. But wisdom is where you find it.

We all tend to cling to successful recipes, in cooking and in administration, even in religion, hoping to perpetuate successes of the past. It is a human fallacy. We pretend we can force things to remain as they are now. By giving us a formula for success Hoffmann has, whether knowingly or not, restricted the evolution of the society in a format attuned to the nineteenth century. He bought social stability for the price of progress. The break from convention he initiated served him well, but convention has a habit of re-establishing itself at any level, and especially so in times of peace and prosperity. I personally do not believe Hoffmann, if he was here now, would endorse the use of strategies from 150 years ago (even his own) for practising on our children today. He would delete the verses from the Templer hymn which no longer fit the intellectual and social climate. He would bring out another Sendschreiben.

We tend to become complacent in the light of past successes. It is pure hubris to imagine that we, the Templers, have in our current religious philosophy attained the ultimate wisdom, and with it the only path to the Kingdom of God. Even Jesus could today no longer afford to say, "no one comes to the father except through me." With universal literacy and education came awareness of the need for diversity, for change. To paraphrase a popular saying, "a life of pure happiness is a dream, and a bad one at that. It would be hell on Earth."

Today we realise there are not only many mansions in the Father's house, but also an infinite number of ways of getting there. No two persons have the same DNA, or fingerprints, nor can they walk exactly the same path their whole life through. Sometimes we are privileged to share a section of life's path with a friend. We walk together and we talk together and we explore the meaning of life. Until one day we seem to talk past each other and we realise our paths have separated. The path to enlightenment is different for all of us, and each generation must find its own way home.

Take a classical example, the Kingdom of God, which we Templers have pinned onto our banner. For the Jews of the Old Testament the kingdom of God was the Coming of the Messiah, sitting on the throne in the City of David, bringing back the glory of Israel. In the New Testament it is the second coming of Christ, the ultimate defeat of evil, resurrection, a new Jerusalem, with golden gates and streets paved with precious stones. For Hoffmann, the 'Kingdom of God' meant people living harmoniously together all over the world, in social communities based on the practical examples given by Templer Communities. It is debatable if Christoph Hoffmann actually believed in the second coming of Christ, although the original motivation in going to Palestine made use of the popular sentiment. His insistence on having the centre of Temple Society administration in Jerusalem, is often quoted as a preparation for this event.

So, what is it today, 115 years after Christoph Hoffmann, that we see as the goal of the society? What do I, - what do you see in your mind when you speak of

the Kingdom of God? - In my capacity as publisher of the TSA Internet Homepage I see the text of many of the Elders Services/Saals. As I scan them into the computer and onto the Internet I am forced to read each of them carefully through to check for mistakes machines sometimes make. From initially being a chore it has become a stimulating experience. The scope, the depth and diversity of thoughts are a revelation. - I would like to suggest here, these philosophical gems should really be made more readily available to the public. At present they are just stored and filed in the TSA office. I feel it would be a good idea if they were printed and bound in handy yearly or half yearly volumes and distributed to anyone interested, perhaps for a small financial consideration. I am sure it would generate a lot of philosophical discussions and advance the Templer cause by constructive interaction. A peer review so to speak. If you have access to the Internet you should really from time to time browse through the TSA Homepage and look at the section on Saals and Services.

There are now literally hundreds of Saals collected in our Internet Archives, going back three years. - So, having read those Services, and listened to other Templer Elders speak, I see the term 'Kingdom of God' defined by our people in many different ways:

- The Kingdom of God is not of this world.
- The Kingdom of God is within us
- The Kingdom of God is following the teachings of Jesus.
- The Kingdom of God is of and for little children
- The Kingdom of God is saving the Earth.
- The Kingdom of God is harmony amongst all creatures, great and small.
- The Kingdom of God is the elimination of all evil
- The Kingdom of God is a perfect but unattainable social condition and our job is to forever strive towards it.
- And then there is of course the attitude the Kingdom of God is all of those things together, plus no poverty, no wars, no hunger, no oppression, no discrimination, no reconciliation, etc .

If you are a regular Saal-goer you may be able to put actual faces to these interpretations. Although they all sound beautiful, to me those definitions all lack something practical, some guidelines, or at least a suggestion on how to take the first step. I am reminded here of the old story about the Sydney Harbour bridge. Two people are admiring the massive structure of the bridge. "What an engineering feat, what a soaring symphony of steel," one says excitedly to the other, "how could any human hand conceive it". "Oh, I don't know about that," says the other, "I think I could build it, provided someone told me where to put the first stone." - We have to lay that first stone or the Kingdom will forever remain a pipedream.

What about Jesus, you say? Surely He tells us how to go about it? Yes, Jesus did give lots of instructions, each one theoretically leads to a better society. But why haven't they? Everyone knows them by heart. Yet they did not then, 2000 years ago, and do not do so demonstrably now. Why not? They all fall in the category of striving after the unattainable. They presume idealised conditions and promise an eventual reward in eternity. They do not deal with things as they are

now. An unattainable goal, a Kingdom of God where progress cannot be measured, is no better than Hoffmann's blind faith in the Book of Revelations. A religion divorced from common law and common sense is not of this world. If not paired with scientific intelligence, it does very little for mankind. Most of the humanitarian relief for suffering on this Earth is done through social organisations, through scientific advances, and not through religion. It was Hoffmann who linked religion to science. He saw the need to temper pure religion with an awareness of science.

Hoffmann is often quoted as having said "...there are questions which cannot be dealt with scientifically, because they lie outside the scope of proof available to humans." I personally think this is misquoted in many applications, especially when it is interpreted as an admission that there is a definable limit to science and to the human intellect. I personally think the quote should be seen as a tribute to the human mind, to our imagination, which can soar above the mundane, think about thinking, philosophise and ask questions on abstract things that may defy logic. Even everyday statements sometimes defy a logical answer. For instance, can you tell me 'why the third hand on a watch is called the second hand'? Or why 'a telephone wrong number is never busy'? Why the time of the day with the slowest traffic is called rush hour? - Christoph Hoffmann has always emphasised the value of the scientific aspect of the mind. Biologically there is no limit to the capacity of understanding of the human mind. We put this limit on ourselves. In Hoffmann's time it seemed beyond the scope of humans to walk on the surface of the moon. Did you see that beautiful full moon last night? We have proved it can be done. It seemed beyond the scope of the human mind to ever know the composition of the sun, much less the stars in the night sky, or to put a measure on the Universe. Before the atom revealed its secret to us the sun was thought to be a giant coal furnace expected to last less than a million years. Today the feeble light from stars billions of light-years away tells us exactly what the stars are made of, how hot they are, how heavy, how far away and how fast they are moving. This is a fascinating feat of human ingenuity. All this information from a snippet of light, cut from a beam that has been travelling through space for millions of years. - At a time when a timetable for the complete sequence of the human genome is reality, when I can theoretically talk to anyone on this Earth by just pressing a series of buttons on a pocket phone, I can confidently say, if there are limits to science, and limits to the mind's comprehension, then these limits were not put there by our maker, they are of our own making.

If everyone only accepted proof once they see it, who would be left to provide this proof? I look at the person who relegates aspects of our lives to blind faith, as shirking responsibility to humanity. If we place an arbitrary limit on science and our mind, do we not deprive future generations of the joys of discovery?

The Amish did that. They made a line through evolution and said it was OK for their forefathers to have discovered hooks for their coats, but modern buttons or zippers are works of the devil. - I wonder how they feel about Velcro? - I say it again, those people who maintain there are certain things which are beyond our ultimate capacity to understand, things we should leave to Faith, do a great dis-service to mankind. They restrict a God-given talent to mediocrity

Please, do not equate Faith with trust. There is a subtle difference. When I say, I trust you - or the Government, I don't mean faith. We can qualify the extent of the trust. Such as "I trust you to pick me up tomorrow? Or will I trust myself not to eat late night snacks? Can we trust the Government to cut taxes with the implementation of GST? I feel trust is one of the higher human virtues that is sadly neglected. No other gift is valued more, and no other challenge more severe to live up to, than the trust someone has placed in you. Who has not suffered the disappointment with a child when its trust in you exceeds your capacity to deliver? Our forefathers entrusted the Temple Society to us. - That is the flip-side of the coin of trust. Trust must always be measured out intelligently, it places a heavy burden on the recipient. Let me tell you a little story about trust I read somewhere. It illustrates this point:

Once upon a time, upstream from a small village there stood a mighty dam that held back the waters of the stream for year-round storage for all the surrounding area. One day when it was raining heavily this mighty dam developed a crack and the authorities felt it was necessary to evacuate the people from the village. So, the local Police went from house to house advising everyone to pack up their essential belongings and make for the shelter on high ground.

On the outskirts of the village right next to the stream there lived a very religious man who insisted on staying put. "God will protect me from the waters," he said, "I put my trust in the Lord". Overnight the mighty dam gave way to the mounting pressure of the water and the stream rose rapidly and started to flood the houses. A Search and Rescue crew patrolled the area in a boat and saw the man sitting in an upstairs window of his house with the basement already flooded. They steered their boat over to him and called out "jump in the boat quickly, the water is rising fast. "But the man said: "I'll stay. I put all my trust in the Lord". So they went away again. An hour or so later a helicopter came by assessing the flood situation and spotted the man standing on top of the roof of his house, the waters already washing around his feet. "Grab this rope", they shouted down to the man, "we'll pull you up". But the man shook his head and replied, "Go away, I have faith in the Lord."

Not long after the man came up to the pearly gates of St Peter, and angrily demanded to see God. "Lord," he said, "I have put all my trust in you, how could you let this happen? I prayed to you. How could you just let me die?" The Lord looked at him astounded and said: "I sent the police to warn you, didn't I?" He said, "I sent a boat to rescue you, I even sent the helicopter to save you! What more did you expect?"

Trust has to be paired with realistic expectations. There are no miracles. Anything attributed to miraculous events is a sign that we do not yet fully understand the relevant aspect of Nature. The only miracle in the process is the effect our trust has on our fellow humans, on our neighbour. A helping hand offered in need is indeed a miracle of emotions. It makes us human. Sadly it often takes a great tragedy, a personal loss or even a natural disaster, to make the basic need for human trust rise to the surface. Too often in daily life a helping hand is eyed

suspiciously, its intentions mistrusted. But trust in the fundamental goodness of mankind is a necessity of social survival. It is an acknowledgement that we could not possibly survive without a social structure. Communities are built on trust. Trust is the most precious gift you have to offer to anyone. It is the highest tribute you can pay your neighbour. It is a commitment way beyond love.

Well you may ask, if all aspects of religion can be explained in natural terms, why do we have religion? Why is the need for religious contemplation, for religious gatherings and even belief in a supreme being in us so overwhelming? I can't answer that, - yet. Religion seems to be something humans have a need for. Universally so. I place religion on a level of social needs, together with language.

Language is universally human. It allows the mind to express itself beyond the basic bodily needs, to philosophise. Researches put the known number of different languages on Earth at some 6,000. They marvel at the variations between them and the ingenious use of sound and grammar in their structure. They study languages in an effort to find out how the brain developed the capacity for language. We can actually relate to someone using another language even if we have no knowledge of that language. We realise this person is capable of rational thought and our mind can relate to rationality. I'll give you an example: In most modern languages the speaker places the objects around him as to the left, right, before, behind, above or below. This is very convenient for orientation from your own point of view, but places the listener at some disadvantage. If I want to indicate this window there, I say the window on my right. But then I have to qualify this by saying, to your left, because you are facing me. Now in one obscure language the people actually reference all positions around themselves to the equivalent of our East, West, North, South. They do not have left or right, but rather east and west, which in our case would mean I should say the window to the East. That makes the information unambiguous to everyone in the room, but it places an intellectual burden on the speaker, who at all times must know his position on the compass. But it appears even the little kids of this group are quite fluent in this respect. - I might mention here we do this in a limited sense too, with above and below. If I should stand on my head, I still refer to the ground as below me and the sky as above.

Religion, like language is such a universal human attribute. It unites us at a level of thought above the selfish biological necessities, regardless of what religion it is. The differences in world religions are due to social and cultural adaptations. A sacred place can be a Hall, a Church, a Mosque, a Temple, an Aboriginal burial site or wherever people meet with the intent to join in worship. In the intellectually enlightened environment of the third millennium no religion should be promoted as absolute truth anymore, or even true Faith, but as a unique expression of our cultural heritage, like language, as our way of looking at the philosophy of life.

My suggestion for religion, my way to the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Life as I like to call it, is to align religion now with the one force which brought about most improvements in living standards to this world, the one human attribute that bridges all religious boundaries, that produced language, that created the science

to feed the growing millions - the human intellect. In partnership with intelligence religion can bring all its persuasive powers to bear on the seemingly insolvable problems of our society. It can rise above the petty disagreements of religious and cultural differences. It can be taught in any school. I have named this new entity Inteligion. Here are some of its points:

- Inteligion teaches us that religion is not a personal issue. Love your neighbour as yourself really means, love him as an essential part of yourself. Your survival, yes even your ascension to heaven (if such is your philosophy), is intricately linked up with the people around you. Your survival is no longer just a case of being stronger or smarter than your neighbour. You must learn to trust him.
- Inteligion, by bridging all denominations and religions above the level of their dogmatic differences, allows humanity's problems to be tackled universally. It can provide the science to bring water to drought-prone areas and prevent food famines. Food, Water, (Electric) Power and Shelter from the elements are the four pre-requisites to a stable population and should be the main priorities of any society.
- Inteligion will help us concentrate our efforts on the common dangers to the Kingdom of Life, the unfeeling elements of nature, the heat, the cold, the storms and floods, the earthquakes and the threat of giant meteors from space.
- In time Inteligion may prove to us humans that happiness is a state of mind, only achievable through creative work. You cannot buy it, fight for it, borrow it or steal it, and it is most satisfying if it is shared with others.

I will leave you with this challenge:

Religion stirs up deep emotions in us. But these emotions are unfocused. Sometimes they bring out the best in people, but more often the worst. Let's take the next step in Hoffmann's religious revolution by targeting the best in man, use the intellect and start making our religion more user-friendly, practical and relevant.

Let us now sing hymn number 15 in the little green book, "Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte!" And give thanks to what unites us all, and remind ourselves on the burden of trust we jointly carry.

Veronika van Krieken.

I now wish you a pleasant Kaffee Nachmittag. Be patient for a few minutes while table and chairs are re-arranged.

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE

BAYSWATER, 13 APRIL 2001

Music: Krista Imberger

Hymns: Befiel du deine Wege... 15 Verses 1, 2 & 4

O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden... 81 Verses 1 & 9

Lobe den Herren... number 64 Verses 1, 2 & 5

Today is Good Friday, in German Kar-Freitag, from the Old German käre, to Jammer or suffer. This is the day Jesus' life on Earth climaxed, almost 2000 years ago, with his dramatic death on the cross. In all of Christendom it is a day of deepest religious significance and reverence. Whatever their creed or denomination, whatever their belief, on this day they join in spirit worldwide and remember Jesus and his suffering. Even the Time Magazine features Jesus on their front page.

Good Friday is of course not a fixed date. Easter, and with it the whole Christian Passion-Week is tied to the phases of the moon, and the actual date can vary from year to year by up to five weeks; from the first day after the spring Equinox (the 22 of March) to the latest date the first Sunday after the first full moon following Equinox can be (the 25th of April). The Council of Nicaea, in AD 325 decided that Easter must be on a specific Sunday, so the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection is no longer tied to the fixed date of the Jewish Passover (during which it happened).

To begin our Service let us sing the hymn Befiel du deine Wege, number 15, verses 1,2 &4

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on that historic first Palm-Sunday, he knew exactly what he was doing. It was part of a chain of events he initiated, his chosen mission in life that culminated in the deep emotional struggle Jesus had with himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. There the full realisation of the, for him now inevitable misery, pain and suffering took hold of him. There the die was finally cast. One more time the natural instinct to flee from danger, to hide in anonymity rose up in him. But no, for him there was no meaningful way out except to drink the cup he had poured for himself to the bitter end. All his friends had advised him not to venture into Jerusalem just now. The Passover celebrations were about to start and the authorities of the city would be watching for signs of public unrest, and any disturbance was sure to be dealt with severely. Yes, he knew what he was getting into, and he knew there could only be one outcome in this head-on confrontation with the establishment. His destiny was clear to him. The prophecies of old would be fulfilled. - Jesus, he who in his mission to bring his message of peace to the people of Israel, had walked the length and breadth of the country on foot, he who never had opted for bodily comfort for himself, he now borrowed an animal, an ass, to ride into the city. Because it was written by the prophet, 'tell the daughter of Zion (Jerusalem) your king is coming to you, riding on an ass that is a colt's foal.'

People came and welcomed him with open arms, plucked palm fronds from the trees on the side of the road and waved them in front of him shouting hosanna and strewed leaves and flowers at his feet. "Hosanna," they sang, "the son of David has come in the name of the Lord! - Blessed is he." Here was their deliverer. The champion of the poor and the oppressed, he would lift the burden from their backs and keep the tax-collectors from their doors. He was the one destined to bring back the glory of king David's time and end the hated Roman occupation of the land. "Hosanna to the king of the Jews".

These were the same people who five days later, when Pilate offered them the choice to pardon either Jesus or a convicted murderer, yelled with one voice. "let him be crucified, let Jesus be crucified, we want Barabbas!" and Pilate, in a symbolic gesture, washed his hands. What had happened? What made the people turn so quickly against Jesus? What had he done that was so wrong?

He had not done what they expected him to do! He had not pulled down the Roman garrison Antonia, he had made no attempts to chase out the oppressors from the city, he had not taken over the reins of government. With all his publicly demonstrated powers over nature and the elements, his God-given talents to overcome affliction and diseases, he had done nothing to ease the lot of the people of Israel. He had misled them in their expectations. What he did do is he went and had dinner with a hated tax-collector. He went to the Temple and drove out the poor merchants trying to make a meagre living by selling a few sacrificial Passover animals. This was not the deliverer they expected.

Passover is the festival when the whole Jewish nation celebrates their release from Egyptian bondage, told in the second book of Moses. God, as a punishment for not letting His people go, had threatened to kill every firstborn child, in each house throughout Egypt that was not specifically marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb. And so it happened. Only the Jewish houses were spared by the avenging angels. Pharaoh had to let God's people go. Since then, the week-long Passover (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) has been the biggest celebration, and one of the holiest periods in the Jewish calendar. - The word Passover is actually an expression used in three different ways: it defines the week-long period of the festival during which no leaven may be kept in the house; it is the sacrificial animal each house has to give to the temple and it is the meal at which the symbolic sacrifice, normally a roasted lamb, is eaten.

Jesus, at a private Supper on the first day of Passover, with only his twelve disciples present, offered himself as the sacrificial lamb, the Passover, to the twelve. He broke unleavened bread, handed it around saying the traditional blessing, "praise be to you oh God, who have made the bread come from the Earth..." but instead of concluding with the customary "...this is the bread of misery our fathers ate.." he added " this is my body which I am giving for you". He poured red wine for them and added, "...this is my blood, the blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for all men." He was offering his body to the people, he was pouring out his life-blood for them, he was giving his life as a sacrifice, so that they could live new lives.

Many books have been written about this Last Supper of Jesus with his dis-

ciples. About its deeper meaning in light of the events that followed. The meal's significance as a symbolic ritual is after all one of the cornerstones of the Christian Churches. Religion, having loaded man with original sin, had to find a way of reconciliation with God and, in the spirit of the time settled for a supreme sacrificial offering. Man's righteousness is restored exclusively by divine grace for any man with faith in the merits of Christ's atoning sacrifice, says the Church.

We Templers do not share the credence in this sacrificial symbolism with other churches. Christoph Hoffmann, in his "Sendschreiben über Tempel und Sakramente" dismisses the magical interpretation of the Last Supper as a misrepresentation of the events, and expresses the regret that Martin Luther, in his sweeping reformation, did not also cleanse this erroneous sacrament from excessive symbolism. By distancing themselves from the glorification of Christ's crucifixion, Templers can concentrate on the living man; on his teachings and on his exemplary life. Jesus, to us, was a man with a mission, he had an idea, a vision of an ideal society, his Kingdom of God, and he took the chance to bring about reform in worldly government by passive people resistance.

Stripped of all its artificial and mystical overtones Jesus' mission was simple: To blend the prophecies of old with his vision for a new world-order. He offered the Jews a chance to change their ways. He showed them how to eliminate social and moral conflict, by giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what belongs to Him. He taught them how to take pleasure in one's own ability to give, so that others less fortunate may live and enjoy life also. How to prepare a world where trusting love reigns supreme and people feel secure in the knowledge they are surrounded by an environment of human compassion. The kingdom of God on Earth. His actual words may have been different to mine, but then, that was 2000 years ago.

His message was not understood. None of his disciples shared his vision. He could not even discuss his problems with them or voice his deeper self-doubt to them. On that last night in Gethsemane they fell asleep when he wanted their support. - They were simple people, fishermen and tax collectors who were ignorant of the significance in the historic writings of the Jewish people. Their thoughts centred on the bodily needs of today, they worried about their safety and well-being away from home, in an unfamiliar environment. So their master Jesus was captured.

Text: Mark 14; 53-64

And so, as he himself had predicted, as it was foretold in the scriptures, Jesus died on the cross, an innocent lamb, a sacrifice to the vision that man may live in peace with himself and his God. We will now sing the choral O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden, number 81, verses 1 & 9

Deep emotions are a rich source of creativity. Much beautiful music, books, films and countless paintings have been inspired by the humanitarian conflicts embedded in religious beliefs. It is difficult to imagine our world without those creations. Our culture depends on it. Emotional experiences provide the scope for the human mind to rise beyond the limitations of the physical world. The question

then is, are conflicts, pain and suffering an integral part of our being, and essential to human creativity? All indications are that they indeed are and that we need them. We know these days the biblical vision of everlasting happiness and eternal bliss on Earth is an illusion. Not because the practicalities are impossible. No. Many experiments have been done in which all of life's necessities were provided to the participants and yet these supposedly ideal conditions did not produce long-term happiness, contentment or the ideal society amongst the participants. The philosophy of Communism is perhaps the largest example of such organised bliss. On a Nation-, or even world-wide basis, it failed. It failed because any advanced form of life will not be satisfied with merely existing. I have said it before, man was not thrown out of the Garden of Eden, he left because he could not stand the monotony any longer. Not even a domestic animal is content in a cage, even a golden one. Our mind needs intellectual stimulation and our body needs physical challenges.

Modern philosophy must reflect this awareness. The philosophy Jesus was teaching at the time was radical. In those days, 2000 years ago, the people of Israel believed in the power of the sword and in miracles. Their world was controlled by the Old Testament and the prophecies of holy men. Even the few people who believed in Jesus foresaw the difficulties in changing people's attitude, with nothing more than a promise and a singular example. Today we still baulk at the magnitude of the change Jesus envisaged. While we may now be able to explain how the Earth was created, what moves the Sun and the stars, understand how the weather and the elements interact, how procreation works and how to stay physically healthy, we have not gotten any closer to the type of human society - the Kingdom of God - that he was advocating two millennia ago. All understanding of the biological make-up of our bodies has not yet helped us to prevent armed conflict between nations, cruelty against our fellow human beings and wide-spread famine and starvation on the Earth.

We accept with a shrug of the shoulders the daily news of atrocities in Borneo, the ongoing killings in Palestine; the spread of the Balkan conflict in Macedonia, to name just the few that make headlines at the moment. And for 2000 years we have been preaching the message: Love your Enemy.

I shall qualify what I am about to say with the following reflection: It was the philosopher Karl Popper who said "...history is what we make it. We can interpret history as the history of class struggle, or as the history of the struggle between the open and the closed society, or the history of scientific and industrial progress. All of these 'histories' are perfectly acceptable, and you could very likely name another five just as legitimate as those I have mentioned. But will any of them be unbiased by personal vision? Of course not. We are inclined to see what we want in history, and fail to see (or give the necessary credence to) whatever does not agree with our pet theory. In other words, there is no unbiased history, we automatically create the history that matches our vision for the future."

Love your enemy. It is such a simple statement. By eliminating human conflict it would solve so many social problems. Why has it not found widespread acceptance? You would think all it takes is a bit of willpower and it's done. But it's

not that easy. You see, for millions of years evolution has used the enemy-principle to advance living species against each other. They use each other as stepping stones up the ladder of progress, be it as predator or competitors for food. You get faster I get swifter, you become cleverer, I more camouflaged. We all have seen those graphic David Attenborough documentaries where wit and power are matched against speed, agility and endurance in the struggle for life. It is in our blood. It's part of our animal heritage. Our current society, I mean here society at large, not specifically the Temple Society, has built its recipe of success around this competitive "killer" instinct in man. It fosters the mentality of winning to the detriment of others.

To change this primitive philosophy requires a conscious decision to act in a way which improves at the same time the living conditions of other people. Instead of fighting one-another for a greater share of natural resources we should promote intelligent, scientific awareness and technology in our efforts to raise our living standards. Direct our natural, competitive instincts towards better and more efficient use of existing resources and more effective ways of providing for our needs. But we must be serious about this. It is of little use to condemn the horrors of war and preach love your enemy on Sunday, while-ever society keeps on decorating war heroes and commemorating Anzac Day. Winning in sport or at gambling is just another form of sanitized war and not socially productive.

So you see, the cure cuts deep! Our attitude to the purpose and meaning of life must change. The struggle of man against man does no longer serve any evolutionary purpose, it is now purely an entertainment for the masses and should be faced out from our societies. It is a left-over from primeval times of the dinosaurs when mating struggles ensured survival of the fittest. While-ever our social environment does not change significantly from such people-to-people conflicts, our intellectual struggle against this natural endowment will fail because it makes no sense to our subconscious instincts. 2000 years is a long time to preach a message, the same message. If that message still has not got through to the people, we have to ask ourselves sooner or later, could the fault lie with the message, or the way the message is presented? Surely something must be missing!

I think any proposed change in our way of life must be balanced with an environment that supports and encourages such a change. The change must bring a benefit to the individual. Life is a very prudent administrator, it allocates bodily resources to where-ever the demand in the body is greatest. A classic example is the rapid deterioration in bone structure of astronauts in an environment where strong bones no longer provide an advantage. Or the loss in muscle power of an athlete out of training. Whichever part of the human body or brain, or whatever thought presently produces better and bigger results, or greater satisfaction and pleasure, will get preferential treatment. Before loving your enemy, or even just your neighbour, can become a motivating force in society, a social environment must first be created in which such love is physically and emotionally more rewarding to the individual than fighting or hating.

If we do not actively work on creating such an environment, we will in another 2000 years still be "Wünschen und Warten", wishing and hoping for Jesus' vision

to become reality. Professor Gavin Brown, Vice Chancellor of Sydney University, recently has put it thus: "We predict the future by inventing that future. What our society needs most is a good dose of intellectual aspirations".

Lets listen to a little story on how Jesus in an ever so natural way used the environment to press home his message. I remember the story from way back, perhaps from an old school Lesebuch in Palestine. You may recognise it.

THE STORY OF THE OLD HORSESHOE.

Jesus and the two disciples Simon and Andrew had left a village in Galilee where they had received meagre hospitality, and were on a dusty road to another place. The sun was coming up high and Simon, walking behind Jesus, complained about the unfriendly people in the last village, who had not provided them with any food to eat nor wine to drink; that he was hungry, his throat was parched and the hot sand hurt his feet through the thin sandals. "Master", he asked, "what happens when we get to the next village and again no one will offer us food and shelter. We may well starve to death. Will you allow us to do a bit of begging? Everybody does it, surely it is not a sin. Andrew and I will do it, if you are worried about being seen begging". "Simon Peter," Jesus said in a stern voice, "how little faith you have. Don't you think our Lord knows we are in need and that He will provide for us?"

Simon looked around himself. There was nothing to see in any direction, no people, no houses, no animals, no stream, no fig-tree, not even an olive tree for shade. Nothing but sand, rocks and a dusty road winding its way right up to the horizon. He gave a deep sigh and hurried to catch up to the others who had walked ahead. "Look, Simon" said Jesus, as he caught up again, "look, there is a horseshoe lying in the middle of the road. Go and pick it up so we can take it with us. " Simon, who was hot and sweaty and did not feel like carrying the extra weight around with him, said, "it is just an old bit of iron, it is worthless. No one would give us anything for it," and he kicked it into the ditch by the side of the road. Jesus smiled as he walked over and picked up the horseshoe himself and fastened it in the folds of his robe.

It was late afternoon when they at last reached the next village. As they passed a blacksmith shop Jesus went to the owner and showed him the horseshoe. The man's eyes lit up as he saw it and he exclaimed, "where did you find this shoe? I recognise it. It is one of a matched set I made for a wealthy customer to correct the gait of one of his valuable horses. The horse must have thrown it. I shall let him know immediately that it has been found. In the meantime please accept my hospitality, please stay with us and join us for supper. My wife here is an excellent cook. Our house is your house." With this he ran off to tell the owner the good news.

"The Lord certainly works in mysterious ways" whispered Simon to Andrew sheepishly as the three of them entered the cool dwelling, washed off the dust of the road and sat down to enjoy some refreshing grapes.

What we have learned in the two millennia since that fateful week in the month of Nisan brings with it an obligation to apply that knowledge intelligently,

both as an individual and as a society. Today we are in a position to be not only responsible for ourselves, but also for mankind, for our environment and for the planet Earth. It is a sobering thought, after all those years we have finally realised the meaning of Genesis 1-28 "I have given you dominion over the Earth and everything that moves and grows on it." And that was the end of the sixth day.

To conclude I would like to quote to you a passage from one of Hermann Uhlherr's recent Saals. To me it is beautifully put, and it reads like a prayer. If you can, would you please rise while I read it out to you:

Whenever we try to understand, or analyse, or put into effect the message of Jesus Christ, we come ultimately to the instruction "love one another" in one form or another. If this instruction were easy to follow, we would not talk about it, we would not continually have to remind ourselves that this is what we must strive for; if it were easy we would simply go and do it! That we don't succeed is because it first requires becoming spiritually more aware. Loving one another, in the sense of Jesus' message, is a state of mind, a way of life which does not fit all that well into our modern lifestyle. But anyone who has lived in harmony with God's purpose, be it ever so briefly, knows the joy and deep personal satisfaction there is in doing so.

Thank you, God, for giving us the ability to share these emotions.

We conclude our Service with the Hymn: Lobe den Herren, number 64 Verses 1, 2 & 5. After that please remain seated for a bit and let Krista Imberger's music frame this picture of Good Friday.

I now wish you a memorable Easter Weekend, and remind you there will be an Easter Service on Sunday morning in Bentleigh, with Peter Uhlherr.

NEW YEARS EVE SERVICE IN BAYSWATER DECEMBER 2001

Prelude and music: Elizabeth Wagner

Good evening to you all. Good evening and welcome on this, the last day of the year 2001. Today is a good day to reflect on the year just passed, contemplate on the way we see things and the way they could be. Have we done everything we wanted to do this year, have we achieved our goals? Do we want to make a new years's resolution, get our affairs in order? - With all this importance attached to the start of a new year it is good to remind ourselves occasionally that a year is but an arbitrary time span, of no cosmological significance in itself. Its length is determined by the environment our planet finds itself in, by the mass and spacing of Sun and Earth, and its seasons by the tilt of the Earth's axis. A year can fluctuate by several minutes from one orbit to the next, depending on the position and interaction of the other planets and comets . And the end of the year, our moment in time tonight, is but a point on an endless circle, set arbitrarily at one stage in human history to coincide with the rising of a particular heavenly constellation. Furthermore as this reference point takes 24 hours to travel around the globe, New Year celebrations are at different times in almost every country on Earth. With the Dateline only 3 hours East of us we are amongst the lucky first to welcome 2002 on Earth. Hawaii, 21hrs behind us, is probably the last place to great the new year. You won't feel a bump as we cross the threshold into another year, there is nothing special about tonight except what we make of it.

What we make of it can be very important though. Commemorations and celebrations tend to bring people closer together and promote social harmony. And what better occasion to let loose your imagination than the end of an era and the beginning of a new year. Imagination and phantasy play an important and creative part in our lives and I would like to reflect on it tonight

People like to plan ahead, to, in a way, prepare the future, visualise it and make plans for it. When the future then does arrive it will not be such a shock to the system. Even our Templer motto in Matthew 6: 33, by asking us to 'set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice...' in its own way it asks us to plan for tomorrow with this in mind. When Jesus tells us in the next sentence 'not to worry about tomorrow...' he does not mean we should not plan and be prepared for it. It does not mean we should not think about the coming year. Just not unduly worry about it, '...for each day has troubles enough of its own'.

It is in the nature of life to prepare for tomorrow. Birds build their nests before they lay eggs, some go north before winter sets in. Bees collect and store honey during Summer. They do it instinctively, (at least we think so) without being aware of it, we humans go by a man-made calendar. Calendars, by their very nature are organising our time in the future. It comes as quite a shock to realise that there has never been a consistently accurate administration of time in the past, that our calendar is but a few hundred years old. We glibly speak of this

or that event having happened five thousand years ago; that Jesus was born on Christmas Day anno Domini, that is, year one. But a quick reflection shows this time scale was established retrospective, we count backwards, because a universally applicable calendar was not adopted until the twentieth century; when global travel and time-tables made a consistent reference frame mandatory.

Have you noticed the beautiful full moon last night? How it rose out of the trees into a pale sky just as the sun was setting? If you had looked carefully you should have also seen the fuzzy penumbra shadow of the Earth in a grazing eclipse touching the Moon between about 7:30 and 11:30pm. Many songs have been written in tribute to the mystique and the bewitching beauty of the moon. About the lure of its romantic golden light and as a quiet companion of lovers. It was the home of the Greek goddess Selene, sister of Helios the sun-god, and Eos, mother of the four winds and goddess of the dawn. -

Tonight I would like you to look with me at a song about the moon, "Der Mond ist aufgegangen...". A simple song from the days of my generation's childhood about the beauty of nature, and our obligation to see its wonders in an awareness of our human need for each other. It is number 22 in the new Templer hymn-book and we will sing the customary four verses, that is 1, 2, 3 & 7. What I would like to do tonight though, is to sing each verse separately, that is we will sing verse one, then stop so I can say a few words about it, then the same with verse two and so on.

Let's start with verse one "Der Mond ist aufgegangen"

Here simple statements set the scene: the moon has risen into a star-studded sky, with each star a brightly twinkling point of light against a satin background. The trees in the bush are standing black and silent as if waiting for the light of the moon to waken the nocturnal animals. From the paddocks along the creek a hazy fog is slowly rising, ghostly white in the pale moonlight. A feeling of wonder fills the air. These are all things we would not notice during the day. Only the proper environment creates in us an expectation of mystery and wonder. It needs the absence of dominating sensory distractions. Then the senses are joined by imagination and give phantasy a free reign. We may well sometimes see the moon in daylight during its 28 day journey around the Earth. But no one has ever written an ode to a daylight moon. The moon plays a poor second in brilliance to the sun. In fact the sun is almost $\frac{1}{2}$ a million times brighter than the moon. And the stars are 10 magnitudes dimmer still. Even the sharpest eye cannot detect a star in broad daylight. Why not, do the stars go to bed during the day? They don't go anywhere, they are there as bright as ever but we do not see them, for the power of the sun causes the air to become a translucent bluish-white. In the evening, when the sunlight disappears from the sky above us the air becomes invisible again and we can see right through it up into the blackness of empty space. It is as if a curtain was lifted on a theatre stage revealing the players behind it against the backdrop of heaven, and we ask ourselves, where does reality begin?

Let us sing verse 2 of our hymn now "...wie ist die Welt so stille"

In the stillness of the night the world seems at peace with itself. The hushed quiet surrounds us like a familiar and friendly home where sleep can free you from

a harsh day's problems. After a hectic day we long for the quietness and isolation offered by a familiar room, we seek a security blanket to sleep our worries away. It is indeed strange how the light of day gives us the courage to face work and all sort of adversity, in fact we look for challenges, but when night falls we long for the safety of a true friendship and the security of family and community life. Our sense of reality seems to shrink when full use of our senses is restricted. Two seconds is all, the philosophers say, what our mind sees as the present that makes up reality. Ten seconds is the maximum time consciousness can dwell on any one subject or thought before it must refresh itself with a new stimulus, either from the external environment or from the brain's memory banks. Did you know it is impossible to form a complete sentence of more than seven words in your conscious mind prior to speaking it. Try it, you'll find you lose the start of the sentence before you reach its ending. 10 seconds of reality is all we can ever truly call our own in this world.

Let us now sing verse three "...Seht ihr den Mond dort stehen"

When you are young things seem to be so straight forward. They either are, or are not, tall, short, thick, thin, round, square, black or white, alive or dead. All our life, from the time we are born we try to make sense of the world around us and the way we fit into it. Awareness of the surroundings is a necessity of life, an individual's very survival may depend on it. It is deeply ingrained in us, for evolution is an effective teacher and natural selection an efficacious tool. We are the product of countless generations that have gone through this learning institution in survival. As you get older experience teaches you that things are not always black or white, the edges get blurred. Nature has equipped all life forms with sufficient capacity to fend for itself, otherwise we would not still be here, but nature is at the same time a very prudent administrator and seldom invests in unnecessary baggage. To empower a brain with imagination and abstract thoughts is an expensive biological investment, the pay-off for which I feel is to a large extent, still outstanding. That is, we humans seem to have a capacity for understanding complexity way beyond what is currently known and needed by mankind for survival. That's where imagination comes in. The waning and the waxing Moon is no longer a mystery to us. We know how it comes about, and have even learned through that process the relative sizes and distances of Sun-Earth and Moon. But coming to grips with abstract thinking as a learning tool is still at the superstition stage. Take Christmas for instance. Ursula and I have grandchildren that are just starting to question the reality of Santa Claus. The eldest one proudly proclaims 'there is no Father Christmas. When I ask how do you know that? She answers, 'because I know where the presents come from'. When I tried to explain that sometimes life is easier to understand if we use imaginary or abstract concepts, like father Christmas, or a half moon, to make something universally understandable she asked why, when it is so much simpler to tell the truth?

Now, how can you answer that? Is there such a thing as a simple truth that everybody can understand? Without conditions or embellishments? If we wanted to take the simplest approach to giving a present we would not go to the trouble to wrap our present in pretty paper, not tie it with a coloured ribbon, we would give

them as they are, at any odd time in the year and not wait for Christmas to arrive. Pretty soon we would argue there is no need for Christmas at all. You know giving presents is not just about passing something from one person to another. It is a way of showing love and friendship and pleasure. And this truth is brought out more fully in the care you chose and take in preparing the present. But, she argued, how can you make me believe in things that are not real? Well, there are different levels of reality, as there are different levels of belief. There is the reality of things you can see, feel, taste, touch or smell; Other things like electricity, radiation, gravity, life, you can only know from the effect they have on other things; and then there are things which don't exist on their own, but are needed to make something else understood properly, we call them concepts. Such as loving your neighbour, friendship, dimensions, democracy and trust. We believe in our parents, we believe the schoolteacher, we believe in God, and sometimes we make-believe with a fairy tale in 'once upon a time' just to enjoy ourselves. Our mind works best if it has those concepts to work with, to play with, to build bridges between people over otherwise impassable divides in social interactions, and around large gaps in our existing knowledge. Had she been a bit older I could have mentioned how the belief in an omniscient and omnipotent God makes us aware of our limitations and lets us strive to greater perfection. I could have mentioned Religion, how it can be used to build a bond between people of vastly different persuasion. How the differences in the major religions of the world are like the differences between the waters in a lake or in a river or in a sea. It's the same water only presented differently. I could have picked lots of subjects, but on the spur of the moment I picked time. You can't see, touch or taste time, yet you know it exists. Ah, but you can measure time! No, you can only measure the passage of time, not time itself. Time does not exist on its own, it is something that helps us organise ourselves and anticipate the unexpected. And yet, it is only in time that we can see, make sense of, and understand reality.

Let us now sing the last verse "...so legt euch denn ihr Brüder"

The capacity for human kindness, of altruism, of calling everyone your brother, is deep within all of us. If touched by circumstances it evokes a mysterious longing to please, which is rewarded by a feeling of grateful pleasure. Is it a purely human attribute, a selfless caring for others? Is it self-denial or is it an advanced form of a natural trend, the herd-instinct, visible in its basic structure already in all developed animals? Perhaps it is an unconscious awareness that survival of the individual is meaningless without survival of the group and the species. Something which, like the evolution of sexual propagation, is essentially a recognition that survival of evolution itself is based on ever greater diversity. We know that caring for our fellow humans, helping our neighbour, is good for society. It makes for a caring environment in which people tend to respond in kind. It is a healthy community where children can play and grow up believing in the benefit of friendly competition.

Sleep peacefully neighbour, for the wind of reality is hard and cold. Knowledge has given us the means to soften its edges, and imagination makes this

world a home. Knowledge does not destroy the beauty of nature, nor does unravelling a mystery make it go away. The structure of matter was once a mystery, so were energy and light and life. These things are no longer mysteries, yet they have not lost their fascinating appeal. Man has evolved to be creative, and creation means challenges and change.

Dear God, do not punish us for the things you have given us to bear, but give us the strength and the compassion to live with the responsibilities the creative life for which you have made us, of necessity brings with it.

I would like to re-count now the people who passed away in the Temple Society during the year just ending. There are 23 names on this list. Would those of you who can do so please rise as I read out their individual names, in respect for their memory:

- Helen Wagner;
- Marion Bieg;
- Pamela Böhmer;
- Erna Blaich;
- Ida Buchhalter;
- Johanna Sottek;
- Elfriede Wagner;
- Augusta Gassmann;
- Hugo-Kunz Hoffmann;
- Marianne Osswald;
- Helene Fröschle;
- Erich Steller;
- Paul Hoffmann;
- Paul Struve;
- Ursula Frank;
- Grete Lange;
- Herbert Kübler;
- Otto Wurst;
- Norman Talbot;
- Richard Imberger;
- Peter Dyck;
- Hildegard Buchhalter;
- Gertrud Pulst.

We remember them and all the others not on this list in gratitude for the contributions they have made during their lifetime, to their families, to the community, to society and to mankind, and for enriching the lives of all those they touched with their presence.

During the same 12 month 10 babies were born into our community. They are as follows:

- Sebastian Sutterby, (Sutterby/Ulrich);
- Nikita Bulach, (Bulach/Bennet);
- Timothy Ruff, (Ruff/Arndt);
- Alison Cross, (Cross/Beilharz);

- Sophie Behnke, (Behnke/Eppinger);
- Emma Wied, (Wied/Tesselaar);
- Nicholas Franz, (Franz/Ziecik);
- Alexander O'Brien, (O'Brien/Uhlherr);
- Matthew Heron, (Heron/Knaub);
- Daniel Lu, (Lu/Hoffmann).

With God's blessing we wish each and everyone of those newcomers to this world a long and happy life. May they be a joy and delight to their parents (and grandparents), and may they all in time find the satisfaction a creative life brings to every person.

Amen.

Please be seated.

To conclude this evening's Service we will now sing the Hymn "Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund..." number 47 in the new Hymnbook. We will sing all 8 verses.

Please remain seated as Elizabeth Wagner on the piano will bring this Service to a close. May the old year guide you gently into the new, and may the new year grant you all the peace, prosperity and happiness you seek.

JULY 28 SAAL IN BENTLEIGH, 10:15 FOLLOWED BY COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Music: Ingrid Lämmle/Ruff

Hymns: Number 64 Lobe den Herren verses 1,2,4 & 5
and 75 Nun danket alle Gott, verses 1 & 2

Good Morning! Today's Service will be followed by a discussion session (after the customary coffee break) in which you can voice your thoughts on the subject chosen for the debate. As advertised in the July Templer Record, this is called "The Role, or Relevance, of Science in Religion".

With the vast range of what goes as religions these days I think we should concentrate on the subject with the Temple Society in mind, and how it affects our Templer belief. To me religion must of necessity include an awareness of ourselves, our surroundings and how we fit into the community environment. It should help us understand ideally our neighbour's needs to the extent we can respond to it without being asked. Would you call that science? Whilst my Service today may seem to be oriented this way it is not my intention to pre-empt the debate, just to stimulate it a little. I look forward to hear your thoughts on the subject later on. So, lets start today's service in the usual way with a musical thanksgiving.

Hymn: Lobe den Herren

My talk has the theme of asking, and the text comes from Luke 11 verses 5 – 10. – Chapter 11 starts off with the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus responds by teaching them the essence of the Lords Prayer. At the end of which he offers an explanation why he feels an earnest, genuine prayer or plea for help will always be answered. We pick up the thread at verse 5:

Then Jesus said to them, 'suppose one of you has a friend who comes to him in the middle of the night and says, "my friend, please lend me three loaves. For a friend of mine on a journey has turned up at my house and I have nothing to offer him"; and he replies from inside, "don't bother me. The door is shut for the night, the children and I have gone to bed; and I cannot get up and give you what you want".

I tell you that even if he would not provide for him out of friendship, the very necessity in the request will make him get up and give him all he needs.

And so I say to you, ask, and you will receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.'

The story then goes on and says, "if you, then, bad as you are, would do so, how much more will the heavenly Father give to those who ask him".

As a way of leading into the subject of asking I would like to tell you a little

tory. At a meeting recently I was prompted to tell the tale of the Hufnagelsupp. Now, roughly translated, a Hufnagelsupp is a soup made with iron horseshoe nails instead of peas or pumpkins or eggs or such. Nothing more elaborate or costly than a horseshoe nail. It is not another iron-man breakfast food, it is a parable, a story with a message.

You see, parables, the telling of stories that amplify a philosophical problem to which there is no simple Yes/No answer, did not die out with Jesus. Nor are they exclusively biblical in nature. They have been used by philosophers long before Jesus' time and are still being used today to great effect by experienced public speakers in making a finer point.

For me the story came from our Lesebuch, the official school reader in those times, in my early school-years in Palestine. I'll tell the story again with apologies to those of you who remember it better or could recount it better than I.

The scene is a house at the edge of a forest, somewhere in Germany, in the time when the horse reigned supreme. It was a time of great famine and weary travellers were a common sight on the road. The character of our story is a man, tired and hungry, finding his way through the forest, and glad when at long last he came across a house. He knocked and after a while a woman opened the door, looked him over, from scruffy head to worn shoes, and impatiently said something like, 'what do you want?' 'I am very hungry', the man said, 'could you spare me some soup or a slice of bread, please?' The woman was alone at home, it could very well have been a blacksmith's house and the man was out in the forest making charcoal for the furriery. 'Go away,' the woman said 'there is nothing to eat in the house'. 'Please' the man said, 'surely you could find something for a man who has come a long way today'. 'These are tough times for everyone' the woman said 'we ourselves have barely enough to live on. If I gave to everyone who wanders in off the street we would starve ourselves. Be gone'. The man searched his pockets for something that he could offer the woman to help change her mind, but all his cold and stiff fingers found was an old horseshoe nail. 'Please', he said again, 'there does not seem to be another house around for miles, I won't need much, if you just bring me a bowl of water I will show you how to make a nourishing soup with just a horseshoe nail.' Remember, horseshoe nails in those hosedays were as plentiful (and cheap) as matches are these days and, being a blacksmith's wife the woman immediately saw the potential in using horseshoe nails as a base for a nourishing broth.

Her curiosity was aroused and she invited the man into her kitchen where the pots and pans and the water and the fire were. 'Here you are', she said and watched carefully as the man drew the old horseshoe nail from his pocket and started to stir the water in the pot and put it on the fire. 'Can you hand me the salt from the shelve there for seasoning please?' 'No harm in that' the woman thought and did as she was told. 'And a bit of that flour there for thickening. See, that is already starting to look quite appetising, doesn't it' the man said, stirring the broth all the while with the horseshoe nail. 'I see you have some left-over potatoes there, we might as well mix them in, I'll dice up some of those carrots and parsnips while you get a strip of bacon from the pantry.' The woman probably

realised by this time what was going on, and that she had been taught a lesson in common courtesy, human compassion and grateful humility in sharing with those that have less than, and are worse-off than you are. She joined in the spirit of the occasion and they both had a healthy and satisfying meal together, made, as the man said, with a horseshoe nail.

So far the story of the Hufnagelsupp. The horseshoe nail here is of course the catalyst (as they would say in chemistry) that changed the water into soup without being affected itself in the process. I have used the expression before in the context of: it does not really matter where you start or what you start with, if you have imagination and perseverance you can build on it and achieve your goal. All roads lead to Rome, sort of thing. — Why I am telling you this story here is not just for its simple message, but today's subject of asking brought to mind the unexpected negative reaction I received from the members at that meeting I mentioned before: 'I see,' one responded, 'so the man was nothing but a common con-man!' That shocked me. I had never seen the story put in that light, and it made me think. To me it always had been a lovely story, the delicate twist in it revealing the need for a human touch in our social interactions. Without this occasional humane touch the barriers we tend to erect around our emotional selves in our daily struggles will in time harden, and we become insensitive to the needs of our neighbour. It is easy.

You get asked a few too many times for help and in no time you slide into the comfortable attitude: why can't they look after themselves? Serves them right, why don't they get a job and work hard like I do? Or, they should have saved something for a rainy day; planned ahead! – But you see, this attitude does not redress the problem; it does not relieve an immediate, pressing need. Would you describe Jesus as a con-man when he found himself in the wilderness one day and fed himself and 5,000 others with nothing but five loaves of bread and two fishes? You can read the story in Matthew 15:34, and 16:9, and in Mark 8:5. – Or in John 2, when at a wedding feast in Galilee Jesus made water into wine, would you say he conned the people? No? Why not? because there too was no malice involved, no intend to hurt or to deprive, only the desire to fix an immediate problem by breaking down the barriers of selfishness that isolate and separate people from each other, (the ones that have from the ones that do not have), and open our eyes to the needs of others.

This is the way I have always seen the moral of my little story: To ask in such a way that it allows the other person to acknowledge my need without feeling pressured or compromised. That to me would have been the true Christian interpretation of the events, I thought. But, I was wrong. Those of you who know their Bible, and have listened carefully when I read out the bible text before, will have noticed that I have changed one little word in the text. It is an important word, one that changes totally the moral of the story, and puts the reference to a "con-man" alluded to above in a more prominent light. To demonstrate, I will read out that particular sentence again, this time verbatim as written in the New English Bible: "I tell you that even if he will not provide for him out of friendship, the very shamelessness of the request will make him get up and give him all he needs." – That is

what it says! Shamelessness. It was not an appreciation of the other's dilemma, not sympathy for a desperate need that made the man get up and help, no, it was the sheer impudence (as the King James Bible puts it), the blatant audacity of the person asking, that drove him to get up and help. "Um seines unverschämten Gailens willen wird er aufstehen und ihm geben, wieviel er bedarf." sagt Luther in the German version. – I think my vision of the story is nicer. It is more in tune with the Christian image of today. A belief in the fundamental goodness of man, in his righteous motivation, may not have been essential for society 1000 years ago. Life was cheap then, and the bible seldom refers to man other than sinner or worse. But in today's post-democratic environment, where every individual plays an active part in the evolution of society, a belief in the fundamental goodness of each person is a cornerstone of our society.

It is just another way of looking at life, but the shift in emphasis has dramatic, positive feedback results in making giving and helping your idea, not your obligation. You could call it the 21st century religion.

Religion, like other natural phenomena, seems to evolve in steps, or what Stephen Gould called punctuated equilibrium. A long period of adaptation is followed by a sudden breakthrough in conceptual understanding, – and greater, more efficient utilisation of what nature provides is the result. Then follows again a period of familiarisation with (and adapting to) the new conditions before the next step. New knowledge and greater insight into the workings of nature gives us a higher awareness of life and our place in it. It was probably the evolving society itself, with greater overall awareness (scientific and other) more than Christoph Hoffmann, Hardegg and other religious revolutionaries, that demanded change. They were just the outward signs of an impending change already in the making. Did you know that the sum total of human knowledge has doubled in the last twenty five years, and at the present rate of increase will most likely double again within less than a decade? Small wonder successive changes nowadays leave little time for adaptation. We are in the midst of another such religious upheaval right now, as religion tries to come to terms with (to adapt to) a new, resourceful human image.

Socially religion used to be the mirror society watches itself in. It reflected public opinion. And its role in society was to provide a basis on which all people could be equal. A cultural left-over from a time when the job of governments was to make war and raise taxes. It provided for the conflicting needs of people to live together in submissive safety and the emotional desire of the individual to be respected as a person. It provided a haven of safety in the hostile vastness of the universe and a solid support to our precarious existence at the mercy of the elements. Religion was the forerunner of the bill of rights: before God all people are the same. – These fundamental needs of the individual are now largely being catered for by public governing systems. We have forgotten how to ask, because we believe society owes us a living. In modern society traditional religion has lost its relevance to survival, lost it to the extent that those who do not have (or practice) it don't seem to miss it. It lost it to the social services, to the democratic, inalienable rights of the individual for life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness.

Intellectually religion for a long time provided the only sensible explanation of the universe. It was the frontier of knowledge, the cutting edge, where awareness borders on assumption; and the function of belief was to provide the bridge between the two. Research into astronomy, agriculture, into herbal medicine, into metallurgy and alchemy were all at one time actively promoted by the religious order. Priests and priestesses used to be the experts (and the authorities) on the practical aspects of life. It was only when religion became a tool to manage society at large that belief in itself, belief for belief's sake, became the focus of religion and rituals and dogma took over from the desire to better understand nature. When the Word itself became holy rather than the wisdom expressed by the word. It was then that religion became sidelined to the utopian search for universal love and eternal bliss, and was by-passed with a highway of scientific awareness in which there is no such thing as absolute truth.

Spiritually religion used to offered the people stability in an ever-changing environment. This rock-solid structure is now being seriously questioned as to being beneficial to man. Science has shown that change is the nature of life, and I feel religion in the future must give up its petrified structure and join hands with the population's scientific awareness, or risk gradual diminishing relevance for a technologically informed public.

For an answer to how to accomplish this, I think, we have to go to the philosophers, the people who apply scientific awareness to the way we live. It is man's inventive creations that, more than anything shape society's priorities and even our evolution. The environment, whether natural or man-made has the greatest, the most fundamental effect on our evolution. Physically and mentally. Think of agriculture, how it freed man's intellect to think of more than food. Think of the steam engine and how it transformed industrial society. It gave us the thermodynamic laws, laws that revealed the principles of energy and allowed our mind step beyond what muscle and brawn can provide. Think of the graceful flight of a large bird, drawing lazy circles in the sky. From the age-old dream to soar like the bird came the aerodynamic laws of lift and drag that made possible heavier than air flight and revolutionised mass transport. For the first time in recorded history man could create artificial Earth satellites, leave the Earth, land somewhere else and return safely. A small step for man, but a giant leap for mankind. It forever altered how we see religion and our place in the cosmos. Think of the computer, an abstract creation that arose from the electrodynamic laws and today greatly multiplies our intellectual power. And every innovation, every new concept man has developed, has changed our way of life and increased our capacity to better understand ourselves.

Just as today's scientific community has its revolutionaries and those with the gift to popularise science, such as Cribbin, Davis, Dawkins and Sagan, the religious and philosophical side also produces people with vision, those who see society with the future in mind and highlight our options. One I would like to quote here is bishop John Shelby Spong, author of the books "Why Christianity must change or die", and "a new Christianity for a new World". In it he says, "the new Christianity is born only when theism dies and God (as external to life) disappears

from our consciousness and our vocabulary..." He feels this is a natural progression and, in the present philosophical climate, a step not too hard to take. "But then," he goes on, incorporating some of Carl Young's philosophies, "the revolution will not be complete until "bad" and "evil" are also accepted as natural and necessary. Our capacity to recognise evil when we see it is an inseparable part of us, just as much as recognising goodness is. It is part of our wholeness and what makes us human. Human life is not perfectible without it, ..".

Not perfectible, not because of insufficient compassion, or altruism within us, no, because good and bad, life and death are the very essence of life, and without it we could perhaps exist, but not live. The very first sin committed by man in the bible was essential to the story of the whole book. "It is a startling concept, not easily absorbed," he says, "yet I believe it is a concept begging to be incorporated into the new Christianity struggling to be born in the 21st century."

I think this is a fascinating book and, if you are at all interested in what lies in store for religion and social evolution, well worth reading. He takes the Templar philosophy of the God within us one step further and ties it back to traditional Christianity by saying that a kingdom of God on Earth can only come from the creativeness within us. A section on prayers in the book relates to today's theme of asking, where he invites us to make use of the power within to make our vision of a better world become a reality. "... no longer do we need an external, invasive miracle-working deity who must be implored occasionally to come to our aid. We must seek from within ourselves the God-presence that will enable us to embrace our fragile humanity and step boldly into the experiences of Life."

I see good and bad both as being part of the one attribute, behaviour. Like up and down, take one away and the other becomes meaningless. It is a philosophy crying out to be born in these days of endless, unwinnable wars against terror. 'Let him without sin step forward and throw the first stone', said Jesus, and he did not judge or condemn either.

A little girl at school once wrote a note to God asking: 'Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones all the time, why don't you just make the ones you have perfect and then keep them for ever?' It is the old, top-down philosophy that still dominates much of our thinking, especially in religion. We have to get used to the idea that nature organises itself from the bottom up; where the summed actions of the parts give meaning to the whole. We can no longer continue to see ourselves as a failed heavenly experiment, condemned to an eternal, futile struggle with sin, like Sisyphus forever pushing a falling rock uphill. We are individuals, fully functional temples of God, whose individual contributions to society can create a community spirit that unites us beyond differences of opinion and selfish motivations. It is an idea Christoph Hoffmann made large enough to accommodate at the time the most diverse assembly of individuals, and that today still makes the whole of us greater than our summed parts. A community spirit that we cultivate in our religion and in our awareness of the needs of our neighbour, beyond the need for shamelessness.

It is a vision that globally could accommodate the most diverse religion into a world community, making humanity greater than all mankind. That awareness of

science Hoffmann in his writings stressed as so imperative to a functional religion, the link that keeps religion in touch with everyday life, has to go deep, beyond a passive adjustment to a changing environment. It has to become an active part in widening our intellectual horizons.

When present world governments want to target greenhouse abatement they must address biology, chemistry, physics and marine sciences. Tomorrow's religion will, for its solutions, no longer rely on medieval bible study but such varied disciplines as environment, social studies, psychology and cosmology. As a Templer, grown up in a Templer environment I welcome this bold step in the ongoing religious revolution.

Peter Uhlherr finished his Founding Day Service in June with a call to identify a long-term goal that would make the Templer aim, and our striving modern, exiting and challenging. Let us work together on this project, create such a vision and light the fire of imagination in all the people. Give everyone the opportunity to contribute in their own way and you do not have to ask shamelessly for help. Being part of a higher ideal brings out the best in everybody.

Hymn: Nun danket alle Gott... verses 1 & 2

The 'texts for today' the Temple Society Elders take from the Table of Lessons for their Services are in a way the catalyst, the 'horseshoe nail' in our story above, from which a Sunday service soup then is prepared. The selected text calls forth the thoughts, the ideas, the emotions that carry, like the backbone of a living creature, the words and the sentences that then give features to the structure. If I have been able to make you recognise some of those features, if you found the soup eatable, I hope you will stay and take part in discussions on the role of science in our Templer Religion.

After the 15 minute coffee break we will reassemble in three groups for a 20 minute discussion-session, and then re-join for a comprehensive summary. The three volunteer arbitrators are Herta Uhlherr, Rolf Beilharz and myself.

Thank you.

SAAL 14 APRIL 2002

Music, Elisabeth Wagner

Text: Mark 10: 13-16. Jesus blesses the little children.

Hymn, number 64 "Lobet den Herren den mächtigen König der Ehren...", verses 1,2 & 4, and no. 17. "Brüder singt ein Lied der Freude..." verses 1,2 &3

Prelude

Today's Saal is scheduled as a Discussion-Saal, that means at the end of the Service we will have a short break for a cup of coffee and a stretch of legs, then form into three smaller groups for discussing the subject of communication as indicated in the April Templer Record. For now though relax and enjoy the atmosphere of the Sunday Service. To begin will sing the Hymn: "Lobet den Herren..." number 64 in the book, verses 1,2 & 4.

The text for today comes from Mark 10: 13-16, and the theme for the Service will be my interpretation of what Jesus meant by encouraging people to be like little children. We'll try and find the picture behind the picture that Jesus is painting here for us, 'the picture behind the parable' as Otto Hammer so nicely put it in his February Altersheim Saal. The actual Bible text goes like this:

The [people] brought children for him to touch. The disciples rebuked them [and started to send them away but when Jesus saw this he was indignant, and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it'. And he put his arms around them, laid his hands upon them and blessed them.'

Jesus must have loved the story of the little children. I should say the historians must have liked it, for it appears in every Gospel but John's. And even John uses the expression 'little Children' repeatedly to address his followers and his audience as such, as well as in his letters to the communities, right down to Revelations. Unless you become like little Children you will not enter the kingdom of God. It is a lovely picture the writer of the Gospel here paints for us. At home we have an old German family Bible illustrated with those Dürer type wood-cuts popular 100 years ago, and at Mark 10 there is this full-page picture of Jesus sitting under a gnarly old olive tree, surrounded by young mothers with babies on their arms holding them out to him to be blessed.

What is it, this parable of the little children is trying to tell us? Taking children to be blessed is a common practice. Parents do it regularly. It is every parent's fervent wish to endow the child with the best possible care and support for their future available to them, whether you call it Christening, baptising or presentation. In this picture though the blessing is linked with Jesus' remark that his vision of God's kingdom is for children and only for them. What is the significance of

children, little children at that, to the kingdom of God. A hint seems to be in Jesus' stern admonition to the adults to become like little children, which points to a state of mind rather than a child's physical properties. Something an adult could still acquire (or re-acquire) by conscious practice. That still leaves us with a large period of child development for consideration. Strictly speaking you are a child from the baby stage until you are sexually mature. By English law a person under the age of 14 years. On the other hand it can also mean a family descendant, as in the children of David, how Israelites like to refer to themselves. But when is a child a little child, and what is the defining attribute between a child and a little child? What was it that appealed to Jesus, he who never had any children of his own, in little children? We know that little children are no angels, well, very seldom. They are wonderful and herzig [I could not find an English word for herzig, it would have to encompass all of charming, sweet, dear and loving], but they also have qualities we find deplorable in adults, such as fretful impatience, anger, stubbornness and most of the time don't like to share things: Its mine, I had it first, give it back! Not exactly Christian by nature. -- Childish we call someone simple minded, lacking in maturity, reason and understanding. Yet the expression childlike is normally reserved for noble characteristics like innocence, trust and naivety. In German it is kindisch as in, sei doch net so kindisch, and kindlich as in glauben mit kindlichem Gemüte. This is where the crucial difference could come in. Like little children does not mean childish behaviour and it does not mean helpless babies without any identity of their own, (here I am a little bit like my grandfather Gotthilf Hornung who is known to have said 'all babies look alike; up to the age of 12 month you could have swapped any of my children and I would not have known it'), no, childlike means those things we now and again find to our surprise in children of all ages, unconditional trust, unquestioning innocence and an acceptance of ourselves just as we are. And because it is so rare, when we do find it, it touches us deeply. – There is one more quality that all children have. I shall come back to that, in a little while.

The picture of a world, a kingdom, populated by innocent, dependent children leaves us with another problem. Such a world may have made sense in the intellectual environment Jesus lived. It sounded reasonable when a large part of the population did not know any other than that man was put on this Earth to mature in spirit so that they could die peacefully and go to another world, called heaven, for a life of eternal bliss, for ever and ever. It was their culture. In this other world joyful reunion was to take place and bodily needs were unknown. The Earth was considered a temporary abode for man, created by their God for this very reason. In seven days it was created and God said it was good. And that was all there was to know. No one asked where did the light on that first day of creation come from? There was morning and evening on the first day on Earth even though the sun and the moon were not created until the fourth day. No one asked what holds the sun and the moon in space. Well, a physical concept for space had not yet evolved. They did not have our perspective of the cosmos. There was no Hubble Space Telescope, nor pictures of the round Earth taken from the moon as it hangs suspended in black nothingness, or of other planets, other suns, of galaxies be-

hind galaxies of stars to the end of the universe. They did not know that the light coming to us from some of those stars in the sky has taken ten thousand million years to reach us. They had none of that. They did have their theory of evolution though: man was born out of sin and had to grow and evolve to an awareness of the virtue of bliss, (be born again is the popular expression) as a being capable to enter the kingdom of the chosen, and confess to his iniquity. The why and the how were God's domain and that was not open for debate, it had to be believed. And it was in such an environment that the ideal mental attitude of man was that of a child, a little child, a being unable to fend for itself, to think or reason for itself, who was dependent on constant nurture from an environment made supportive of such delicacy by a benevolent, almighty God.

That 2000 year old picture no longer makes sense today. We now know the need to look after little children is within us by nature; to care and think for them, to teach them until they are ready to fend for themselves. We know it from our own experience and by appreciating an evolving nature; if this were not so then there would be no grown-up people on this Earth to have children anymore. A species that does not provide a suitable environment for its young will die out within the second generation. Their niche in nature will be taken over by a species that does care for its off-springs. Everything that is, is here today because it has evolved a way to fit into the greater environment. Natural Selection is the name given to the process, and not even ignorance of this fundamental principle is today acceptable anymore as an excuse for neglect of one's responsibilities towards children.

The picture of Jesus surrounded by little children touches our emotions though. It evokes a longing for a world in which conflict, unnecessary pain and suffering is eliminated. A world in which intellectual harmony unites mankind, much like a musical harmony can capture the attention of an audience of thousands of people. Sitting in a concert hall have you not wondered on occasions how a slow adagio from a Beethoven piano sonata for instance can move all those people of different persuasions, different philosophy, different ages, even hardened, shrewd business people, into absolute silence. You could hear a pin drop. It touches everyone alike and unites them in their appreciation of beauty. Intellectual harmony is just as gripping in its beauty. Perhaps we appreciate it so much because of the very reason it is so special. Would you go to a concert were the same music was played 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year? Of course not, even if you had the time to do it.

I have said it before, permanent bliss would be hell to endure on Earth. We have to live with the fact we are part of an evolving nature and have the need for changes in body and mind built into us, because it is a necessity of life; if we did not strive for those things we would not be here. The secret is to find the correct balance in what makes us individuals and what makes us part of a species; that "will" to maintain our way of life, and the "want" to be part of the future of nature.

Our wider understanding of nature, the driving force behind what we call life, our part in it, allows us to appreciate the obstacles Jesus was facing in painting this picture of the Little Children for us. People did not understand him. Many

religions still do not. They insist on people having to somehow be "re-born" to become like little children before they can go to heaven. A well known quote says: If a message has been preached continuously for 2000 years and still has not got through to the people, surely there must be something wrong with either the message or the messenger. The kingdom of God has had innumerable messengers, teachers and preachers over the 2000 years since its inception, including the greatest teacher of them all, Jesus, yet the realisation of this ideal society is still as elusive as ever.

We can only assume then, the fault is not with the messenger, but lies in the message itself. It is being interpreted wrong. At least nowadays it is. All parables need interpretation, that is they need an emotional link opened between the story and a common situation people are faced with. A parable's beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, you must be able to relate to it. But sometimes people see a parable in a different time, a different social climate and then draw the wrong conclusion. I feel the conventional, literal explanation of the above parable is unrealistic and asks for something impossible, nature does not work this way. Little children cannot remain childish, or even child-like for the rest of their life and still lead a normal life. They must mature, learn to live in a competitive world where natural selection is at work, adopt to a changing society, grow into adults to reproduce and sustain the environment in a way to support the next generation.

That is not the aspect of life that comes to mind with the expression little children. The reflection to become like little children fits more in the dated belief that an individual's life is eternal in a timeless hereafter, where the kingdom of God is perpetual bliss. The story, as told in the Gospels, does not fit into today's intellectual climate anymore. If Jesus was here today he would not be telling the story in the same way. If there is one thing we have learned in the last two thousand years it is this: Man has no God-given right for life, or for dominance over nature. The right has to be consciously earned anew each day with better knowledge of nature and what makes it tick, and a greater awareness of our place in the cosmos.

There is another famous quote, once given to me by our penultimate TS president Dietrich Ruff. I believe it originated from Mahatma Gandhi: **'A religion which takes no notice of the practical things in life, and does not help to solve them, is no religion.'** For religion to stay relevant to the society of man it has to evolve with that society, with the increasing technical know-how of man, with the evolving problems facing us in the future as we see it. A religion that promotes a kingdom of God exclusively for little children, or for childish or even child-like adults, is no religion at all, because it takes no notice of practical things, how things are, nor does it offer a realizable solution to the problems facing the world population.— Let me now come back to that other quality of children I have hinted at in the beginning, one that would in my opinion give a current meaning to the picture Jesus presents to us in that parable; a meaning not period-bound by conventional interpretation.

The one thing all children have in common is, they are all young! They will in their time see further into the future than we can ever hope to do. Their's will be the future. To them computers, lasers, video recorders, CDs and mobile phones

are not technological wonders, they are the natural, the existing environment, and the basis on which to build their own knowledge. Their minds will understand things we can only see darkly. Our visions will be their realities. They are the future. – Let us try and rephrase Jesus' statement above then in a modern form, the way I feel Jesus would put it if he were here today. Those of you who would like to rise for this affirmation please do so. I feel Jesus would say:

'Let the children come to me; do not try to stop them, for the future belongs to such as these. I tell you, if you want to be part of that future you have to be young at heart, and join a young mind joyfully in creating a future for all mankind'.

Amen.

Thank you.

You will of course have noted that there were no references to 'The Kingdom of God'. I feel there is no satisfactory modern synonym for the expression kingdom of God; one that would carry the emotions from Jesus' time to our current world view. The concept itself is dated. It belongs with a culture that believed in an eternal life for a chosen few people. The rest of the population could literally go to hell. It makes a blanket division between good and bad. Today this is no longer an acceptable philosophy, nor a way of life. Humanity has to make it together into the future, me, you and our neighbour. Diversity is an essential requirement for the success of life, and cultural diversity is an essential ingredient in human society. By replacing God's Kingdom with the concept of Future, my future, your future, our future, it becomes an all-embracing concept in which everyone can become involved. And most of all it belongs to the young. The modern kingdom of God is the future; that's what belongs to the children and the little children. The future that starts now and is tomorrow: **Do whatever you do today in such a way that your conscience can live with it tomorrow, and all the rest will come to you as well.**

The constructive part we all play in this is to see that your future and my future becomes our future, that is our individual actions today will complement each other tomorrow in the world of our children.

Let us now together sing the Hymn 'Brüder singt ein Lied der Freude', verses 1,2 & 3.

In discussing today's text I have tried to make you think about how difficult it is to impart meaning to words and phrases that can then be related from person to person, from age to age, without distorting that intended meaning. A living language evolves with an evolving civilisation and its technological and intellectual advances. We have to be wary of putting meaning into dated words and phrases that would have involved a greater awareness of scientific facts than that available to the original teller of the story. It is often said the culture of a

society is embodied in its language and that it is almost impossible to transcribe the scope of the meaning to a different language. Because words, by definition are just words, and can never fully present a picture, an emotion or an action, the meaning of a word has to evolve with a culture, be backed by it, to be fully conveyed.

That's why it takes half an hour of talking by me and well over a thousand words, to try and impart my concept of the picture of the little children and their kingdom to you. And I am her talking to people of a similar background to me. People that already know what I am talking about. Imagine what would happen if I had to talk to complete strangers about this! It takes continued use in a group of people over generations, for words to take on their definitive meaning and become pictures in themselves. To the gospel writers the expression "the kingdom of God" did not need a definition. In their culture everyone immediately saw in the phrase the new Jerusalem, beautifully dressed up as a bride for the coming of the messiah. Transcribed in a different language, a different culture, the phrase is unlikely to carry the same emotion-laden message. For it is not supported by the fundamental culture needed for comprehension. So, it is vitally important for a group of people, a community, a society, a country, to cultivate communication amongst its people, to generate and maintain a culture of understanding between its members.

There is more to 'talking the same language' than to speak the same language. Not just hallo, how are you, but also creative communication on things deeply felt by individuals. Without such interaction the culture-carrying capacity of a language will collapse and words again will become just empty words. You know the feeling: It's like talking to a stranger.

We will take this subject up again in a little while when we debate the merits of communication in cultural and community evolution as announced in the April TR. Renate Weber, Herta Uhlherr and I will try to lead the discussion on "How would you like to see the Templer Record, the Warte, grow with the times, and what are the future possibilities". As I now close this Service please remain seated and listen to Elisabeth Wagner play "Dies ist der Tag des Herrn" for us, and for her grandson whose birthday it is today. Happy 8th birthday James!

Elisabeth Wagner

We will have a 15 minute break now, there is coffee and biscuit available at the back. Then we will re-assemble in three groups for the community discussion session as foreshadowed in the April Templer Record.

What we would like to concentrate on are: how to improve social communication means practiced in our communities, Telephone, letters, Templer Record, Internet, others. What are your feelings, your ideas your suggestions. Back in 15 minutes.

FOUNDER'S DAY SERVICE IN BAYSWATER 7 DECEMBER 2003

Music: Sonia Glenk

Hymns: "Trachtet ruft..." to begin verses 1, 2 and 3;
to end verses 4, 6 and 9.

"Nun danket alle Gott..." verses 1 and 2, following the Presentation.

Welcome and Good Morning to you all, and a special welcome to our guests from overseas, Tim Christensen and his wife, Dr Erica Beilharz, the daughter of Drs Rolf and Vyrna Beilharz. They are here on a visit from Oakland, California. It is a doubly special pleasure because they have brought their little baby son with them, and Herta Uhlherr will shortly do the Presentation of young Forester before God and the assembled community. If proof were needed, this occasion shows again that a community of people, such as the Templers in this case, need not live physically close together to cultivate a sense of togetherness. Today, in the age of instant communication to anywhere, any shared vision or concept can give people a sense of belonging, make them become neighbours and generate community spirit, even when living on opposite ends of the Earth.

Today is also Founders Day, and our thoughts are directed to the vision and the foresight of the people who, some 150 years ago, against tremendous odds, started to create the social and spiritual Templer environment we still enjoy to this day. The December Templer Record contains an article under Reflections called "Sheltered in a Community"; you may have read it. The introduction to it starts: "Every year in December we observe Founder's Remembrance Day, acknowledging the life and work of Christoph Hoffmann who was born on 2nd December 1815 in Leonberg and died on 8th December 1885 in Jerusalem." It reflects on the ephemeral nature of the settlements he initiated in Palestine and finishes by asking the question: "Was his life's work therefore a failure?"

To us here, who have grown up in the traditional Templer community atmosphere, the question seems bizarre, even insulting. Would you question the value of a sunrise because the sun sets again in the evening? Or question the sense in picking up a book to read if you are going to put it down again sometime later-on anyway? Of course you wouldn't. The sun in its travels across the firmament lights up our paths, it warms the Earth, it makes the plants grow, the birds sing and the animals play, it brings us the wind and the rain and it gives us creative energy. All just with its shiny presence, without actually doing anything; it disappears at night as it came, silently, dependably. But the effect of the sun having been here spreads throughout all of nature.

How do we measure a day's accomplishments? How a life's work? There is no easy answer to this question, so many aspects to be considered. I would like to come back to this subject later on. Let us now begin this morning's Service by singing together Christoph Hoffmann's picturesque hymn challenging us to set our mind on God's kingdom and his justice. Number 1 in the Red Hymnbook. We will

start with verses 1, 2 and 3.

For me it is hard to believe that only a few weeks ago my wife and I were actually in California, in San Francisco with its many wondrous sights of both natural and man-made phenomena. Standing on one of the hills overlooking the city you can see an endless sea of buildings on the land between vast waterways, spanned by monumental bridges. 'San Francisco must be a huge city' I commented to one of the guides. 'Oh no' she replied 'it only has 800,000 residents'. 'Surely not' I said with a sweep of the arm, 'look at all this!'. 'Ah, but that is the Bay Area. It contains some 16 million people'. They have some strange concepts, it is like saying Melbourne has a population 200,000. Or look at the Golden Gate Bridge, it is in fact not golden but a drab, dull red colour. 'Ah', again 'but you must see it at night, when in the glare of the floodlights it truly takes on a golden shine'.

We had a wonderful 7 days in San Francisco. With all our family we were there for the wedding of our youngest son Mark, in a Unitarian Church high on a hill in Berkeley, overlooking the Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. Some hundreds of digital pictures I took tell of our exploits to Muir Woods (the giant Redwood Reserve), Golden Gate Park, across Bay Bridge to Treasure Island, the suburbs of Richmond, Oakland, Berkeley and Hayward, and the city itself, in which (as everyone knows) there are six directions on the compass: North, South, East, West and Up and Down.

With those broad-stroke impression of mine as a background to the home of our overseas visitors, I will now hand over to Herta Uhlherr for the Presentation Ceremony.

Herta.

A small community is the best place to raise our children. I don't think anyone has ever disputed that. Such a community is a natural outgrowth of the family unit and the extended family membership. It usually contains enough children of the same age to develop a sense of companionship in the young minds and a healthy balance between competitiveness and fair play, without being swamped by numbers in a sea of nonentity. We present our children before God to the assembled community in a plea for their caring awareness of the new child in our midst and to remind them on their collective responsibility for our future, embodied in every new human being. As Ursula Hammer so nicely puts it in her reflections I referred to above: 'I always felt confident that we children were loved and appreciated in our community, and that any adult would have been ready to protect me and rush to my aid if necessary. As a legacy from this childhood I have to this day preserved a large capacity of basic trust in my fellow human beings...'

Could we now sing the hymn number 75, 'Nun danket alle Gott... Verse 1 & 2.

A happy heart and contentment of mind, now and forever, what more could anyone wish for. Our heartfelt endorsements accompany this hymn.

So to the text for today's Service. It is taken from the Temple Society's current Table of Lessons, and is about the so-called twin commandment of Love of God and Neighbour. The Pharisees apply yet another test to Jesus and ask him what is the most important commandment in the Bible. The story appears both in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. In Matthew 22: 34-40 it goes like this:

"Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind". That is the greatest commandment. It comes first. The second is like it: "love your neighbour as yourself". Everything in the Law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments."

In Mark 12: 28-34 it is a lawyer, a scribe, who asks: "which commandment is first of all?" Jesus answers,

"the first is, 'the Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength'. The second is this: 'love your neighbour as yourself'. There is no other commandment greater than these." the lawyer then said to him, "Well said, Master. You are right in saying that there is only one God and no other. And to love him with all your heart, all your understanding, and all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself – that is far more than any burnt offerings or sacrifices". When Jesus saw how sensible he answered, he said to him, "you are not far from the kingdom of God."

In essence both readings say the same, but there are subtle differences: In Matthew Jesus answers the question simply with, "love God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, that is the greatest commandment; but to love your neighbour as yourself is equally important". In the Gospel of Mark, though, Jesus prefaces virtually the same answer with the statement "there is only one God..." and then in the end commends the understanding scribe with: "you are not far from the Kingdom of God". Note, both times Jesus is asked here to name only one commandment, namely the most important one, yet his answers seem to indicate that, while to love God should be first, true love of God can only become real (be practised) in the love of your neighbour, and the two commandments must head the list together. This is affirmed even more in Romans 13: 9 as "...he who loves his neighbour has satisfied every claim of the law."

The Temple Society Tables of Lessons is a selection of biblical texts for use on Sunday Services and festive occasions. The selection freely acknowledges the changing horizons of the Templer faith with the passage of time. The texts are meant to stimulate reflection and contemplation on the significance of the events, or quotes reported, and provide scope for discussing our understanding of the present time. –

There are many aspects to today's text. For me, the question of which is more important, love of God or neighbour, depends on what it is you mean by the word Love. By the use of this word, this word alone, a commandment was elevated to the top of the list, surpassing all others. What is the magic of this word? Love,

and the spirit of love are expressions I personally am not very comfortable with. I'll tell you why. I know, everyone uses them, and some may actually know what they mean by it, especially in the context of religion. But I feel the words have, perhaps through overuse in all sorts of applications, lost their impact and are, to my way of thinking, firstly no longer specific enough to provide practical guidelines, and secondly contain no commitment on the confessing person's part to do anything.

What does it mean when I affirm that I love God? We should think about that. How would you today express your love of God, for instance? You could say I love God in his creations, I like to go for long walks in the natural bush environment. I love the light of the day and the quietness of the night. I love the sounds and the smells of the sea and the freshness of the dew. I love the majesty of the mountains and the rivers in the valleys. I love the birds and the bees and all of God's creatures. But is this what the evangelist means in the above statement? No? You could go further and say I love God with every breath I take, I love Him by coming to church on Sunday, by reading from the Bible daily, in singing hymns, by giving to Caesar what is due to Caesar and to God what is due to God. I don't think this is what is meant either by 'love God with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength'. The only way to do justice to this first commandment seems to be to do all of the above, and then more.

Loving my neighbour as myself is a bit easier. At least here we have the guideline that whatever I do for myself I should be prepared to do as much for my neighbour. But again, it is in the details the guidelines break down. How do I love my neighbour? How can I show it? By talking to him or her? Preparing breakfast for them? Wouldn't that be intrusive? Often people like to live their lives as individuals, do things their own way and resent constant interference, even if well-meant, from neighbours. Many a bitter conflict between neighbours has been started this way, in spite of the best intentions. So, even here the word love is not / or at least no longer sufficiently descriptive.

To overcome the difficulty I have on occasions suggested to replace the word love in this context with the word Trust. If I say I trust my neighbour, there are lots of ways I can make this trust visible to him and to the world without intruding into his personal living-space. By the type of boundary fence I erect between us; by not fitting security bars to my doors and windows. By avoiding to use a visible steering lock on the family car when parking it around the house. By exchanging handyman tools freely. Trust is a commitment that has the potential to cost you money one day, but it also has the potential to cultivate reciprocal action in a far more effective way than just saying, I love my neighbour. Surprisingly often, trust is a seed that grows into a bountiful harvest. I pity those people who prefer to live behind bars and security grills in their own home all their life, just on the off-chance that they may be robbed one day by their neighbour.

Trust is a practical expression of our belief in a better world. The first step towards a loving environment is a trust in your neighbour. I believe the trust in our neighbour is at the same time the highest expression of your love and trust in God and his creation. Here we come back to the question which is the more

important, love of God or of neighbour? If it is impossible to love God without loving your neighbour then the two become one. The second commandment covers the first commandment automatically. It is in the trust with which we honour our neighbour and the divine spark that dwells within all of us, that we can most truly express the strength of our religious belief. Christianity is first and foremost a religion about individuals, about persons, about yourself and your relations with your fellow man. I leave the question with you, which do you think would create more joy in heaven: Love of God or love of neighbour?

The original first commandment is of course the definition of God, that there is only one God. It seems strange to us today the way the writers of antiquity found it necessary to continuously reaffirm that there is only one God. We find this statement not only in the Bible but also at the head of affirmations in many other religions. The Islamic belief comes to mind and, as we heard just recently at the Knox Interfaith Meeting on Sikhism, the Sikhs. The Sikh religion also is strictly monotheistic, believing in One God, absolute yet all pervading, a God of Grace of all nations. Perhaps this insistence on a single God was initially a way to set these religions apart from prevailing beliefs at the time of writing, when an overabundance of gods and goddesses populated Egypt, Mount Olympus, Walhalla and the Roman minds. The scene with the golden calf painted in Exodus, where the 10 commandments originated, clearly describes how difficult it was then to make people believe in (and pray to) an invisible God.

Life in the so-called civilised worlds was then controlled by rituals designed to please, and appease, the respective gods, or muses, into whose domain you were about to enter. The wind, the weather, the sea, the fields and the woods all had their individual gods, even the arts, who, endowed with human characteristics and emotions, could easily become unhappy or jealous and offended by inappropriate behaviour. By their ability to control the elements they could play havoc with your efforts to make a living. Greek mythology has for millennia been a rich source and inspiration for classical literature and music, even so very few people today would seriously consider a return to a belief in the sordid stories that so often accompany the gods of classical myths.

With our increasing understanding of the laws of nature we can now find natural causes in most of the environmental changes around us. We have learned to appreciate the cycles of lean and fat years, the floods and the droughts and watch the Earth's oceans with weather satellites. The incidents of bushfires and forest fires may be on the increase but we know this is more due to global warming than the wrath of gods. So we have installed lightning arresters on our buildings instead of performing ritual offerings to appease their anger. Scientific awareness has helped us to overcome the panic at solar eclipses and the phobia of pandemic diseases dumped on Earth by Comets.

But I have only last week had an experience that made me aware how deep within all of us is still a primitive urge to associate gods and the elements. On Tuesday Ursula and I were driving into Lilydale and got caught in the biggest hailstorm I have ever seen. At first I thought somebody was hitting the roof of our car with a cricket bat. Then I saw white table tennis balls bouncing off the bitu-

men pavement and dancing down the road in front of us, like a group of happy skipping girls. The windscreen sounded as if it would shatter at any moment and I quickly pulled the car up on the nature-strip to gain some protection from the trees along the roadside. Now the hail became a continuous bombardment and hailstones shattered off the windscreen into star-bursts like so many explosions. Other cars pulled up in front and behind us. A chap on a small motorbike was trying to hide under his helmet. The blackness of the road gradually changed to white. We were caught in our little capsule, helpless against the fury of the god of thunder and lightning as he vented his anger with the elements all around us. It lasted for about ten minutes, and it ended as suddenly as it started, with very little rain to soften the shock. The sun started to come out, and for a moment the lyric bars that follow the storm in the pastoral symphony came to mind, except there were no birds, they were dead, the trees stripped of their leaves and everything was speckled white. As we carefully pulled out onto the slippery road to join the traffic again and saw the devastation everywhere I had this picture of the gods of antiquity in my mind battling out their immortal conflicts on our Earth. And I wondered if the one-god belief may not be that solidly entrenched in us after all. We have yet to see what effect blockbuster books and movies such as Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter with their witches and warlocks will have on the beliefs of the next generation.

Templers value an awareness of science as an important elements in the quality of human life and, combined with common sense see it as a powerful tool both in the spiritual perfecting of man and for the improvement of our physical environment. For the Templers a religious belief has to be believable. That is one of the unsung legacies from the life of Christoph Hoffmann. And here we link back to the question touched on in the beginning: We honour Hoffmann's memory today not only for the seemingly harmonious community life that prevailed in those short-lived settlements Ursula Hammer so fondly reflects on, no, we measure Hoffmann's achievements in the grandeur of his vision for a better world, a vision based on biblical prophesies but open to human interpretation, and supported by a believable belief. The legacy he left us, the task he charged us with, was to strive towards human fulfilment and harmony on this Earth, a state which for him (in his time) may have been defined with the phrase "the Kingdom of God".

Without the physical challenges of creating the settlements in Palestine, Hoffmann's philosophy may not have evolved to the same degree it has, but his challenges to a rigid establishment, bogged down in religious dogmas and ritualistic worship, would still have had an effect on society. "Faith has to be supported by reason," Hoffmann says in 'Occident and Orient' It must be believable in the full awareness of scientific wisdom and compatible with scientific progress. In today's Templar environment it seems almost naive to entertain a belief that an almighty God, a god who structured an infinite Universe, who created Heaven and Earth, who made the laws of Nature, He who made life possible, who gave it the capacity to evolve and then called it good, would suddenly need human assistance in bringing about a social condition on planet Earth called the Kingdom of God. This strikes me as sheer hubris, an ambition of man, compared to which the concept

of the tower of Babel seems childish. The difficulty is compounded by the many different meanings and interpretations that have been attached to the phrase "Kingdom of God". Is it a perfect world into which we may one day individually enter, by leading a good life? Or a new world order arriving on Earth one day as in '...your kingdom come'? or more dramatically, at the end of days as indicated in the Revelation of John. Jesus himself only ever alluded to the reality of such a kingdom in parables, or as above, raises it to a level of intellectual understanding.

In the Temple Society the emphasis gradually shifted to an awareness that a caring community environment in itself may already be part of such a new world order. Undoubtedly the world religions are continuously evolving with our increasing knowledge of the laws of Nature. With communications getting better all the time the worlds higher religions are going to influence each other more than ever before. Those that do not grow with the realisation that at the heart of all religions lies the fundamental need of humans to believe in the believable, will simply disappear and be relegated to mythology, like the Egyptian, the Nordic, the Greek and Roman beliefs were. Our growing awareness that an enduring world is a world of change and evolution, confirms that the religious philosophy of the future will grow with human consciousness and with increasing scientific understanding, as envisaged by Christoph Hoffmann.

Our founding father may have started his search for the Kingdom of God in the Revelation of John, but he found its expression in the striving for the social and spiritual conditions necessary for such a community of people.

Let us close this Service by singing together three more verses of the Templer Hymn, the verses 4, 6 and 9. "Nach dem vorgestreckten Ziele..."

If I do not end my service in the customary way with the Lords prayer, it is not just for the sake of being different, nor for lack of humility on my part. No. To me my whole service is my prayer. In it I expose my deepest feelings in a reverent search for truth, a truth that we can understand and try to live by. I hope the prayer will be accepted in the spirit it is given.

I thank you for sharing this time with me.

2003 JULY 27 SERVICE IN BENTLEIGH 10:15

Music: Ingrid Lämmle/Ruff

Hymns: No 17 “Brüder, singt ein Lied der Freude...” verses 1 & 2;

Welcome to you all.

At a recent Templer meeting, Anne Eckstein, MP and Representative for Ferntree Gully in the State Legislative Assembly, spoke to the gathering about the benefits that could arise for the Temple Society with a greater general awareness of the Templers, their work and their cultural history.

I am not going to talk about that today. Why I nevertheless mention it now, is because of something Anne said in her address, just as an aside. She said she admired the Temple Society for its achievements, but she could never become a Templer herself because she was not a Believer. That simple statement struck me as profound. – You and I know, that one of the core philosophies of the Temple Society is the freedom of the individuals to practice their beliefs, even their lack of it, each in their own way. We have no dogma, no prescribed rituals and no priests to stand between us and whatever God it is that we believe in. Why then would an outsider see us as group you can only join if you are prepared to give up your freedom of thought and your chosen philosophy? – If we are seen in this way, despite our official non-dogmatic stance on religious matters, we must be either doing something wrong in our promotional efforts or failing to do enough to promote our true image. Are we Templers hiding our light under a bowl?

Before we become too deeply engrossed in such philosophical thoughts let us sing together a song of joy. Let’s sing “Brüder singt ein Lied der Freude...” number 17 in the red hymnbook, verses 1 & 2.

Are we hiding our light under the bed? This is in fact the text for today and it comes from Mark 4 Verse 21-23. – Would anyone take a lamp and hide it under a bucket or a bed? Of course not, you place it on a stand for all to see, so everything that is hidden will be revealed, and all not understood can become clear. Whosoever has ears to hear, let them hear. For only those whom the information reaches can understand, and be receptive for more. –

The text is also found almost identical in Luke 8. In some bible versions the word bushel is used instead of bucket. Luther has used Scheffel, “man soll sein Licht nicht unter den Scheffel stellen” a German word for a barrel like tub with two carrying handles; often used as a dry measure, like bushel.

Are we hiding our achievements under a bushel, or in our archives? It is well known that the Temple Society Australia does not promote itself nearly enough, compared to other religious groups. For some reason our literature is not well known, nor prominently displayed, and our light perhaps not seen as brightly as others. We deliberately seem to do that. It could be a left-over philosophy from

way back, when we have successfully lead in Palestine by exemplary community life. There, in stark isolation from the surrounding social climate, the efforts of individual Templer groups did reflect brightly on the Templer Organisation, and its image outshone everything else within range. This is not the case any more.

Circumstances have changed. We no longer have the inherent advantage of a progressive community in a disorganised environment. We do not live in closed communities any more. Outstanding achievements of our successful individuals today reflect as a rule first on the company they work for, the business they run, the local school their kids go to, the volunteer group they organise, and in the end cast only a very feeble afterglow on the Temple Society. Can we do something about that? Maybe success in private life and in business should be made more visible in our community, acknowledged and promoted as instrumental to greater Templer awareness. Success in any field should be seen as benefiting the image of our society, alongside our outstanding efforts in social care and community culture. It could be we need in the future another publication to complement the religious/philosophically oriented Templer Record. A publication in which social and business successes, or scientific and cultural achievements of Templer individuals can be freely highlighted, and the information made accessible to the wider community in libraries, bookshops and the Internet.

For now it is doubly important that, what little information from the Templers presently reaches the wider community, does represent our philosophy and our aim correctly. Do we in fact want to say that a good Templer does believe, or must believe to the letter what our philosophy statement says? Does our literature say that? Are our interactions with the wider community implying this? If the answer is no to these questions, then what is it, that makes those outside the Temple Society see us as a group of Believers? I think this is an important question and we should try and look for an answer. Believers are normally associated with strict rules and commandments; with blind faith in out-dated philosophies and with scheduled prayers and prescribed litanies. Most Templers, I feel, do not see themselves in that category. Those that do prescribe to such a philosophy are usually people who also belong to a church and are associated with the Temple Society for reasons other than its religious aspirations.

Templers do believe. There is no argument about that. Everyone believes in something. Our official belief is defined in this little gold booklet you are all familiar with. It contains a statement to the essence of the Temple Society's identity, its aims, its beliefs and practical concerns in modern times. It defines, how most Templers sees God as something beyond human comprehension, how the guidelines given by the man Jesus can help us in daily life, how we are to strive towards his vision of a world free from suffering (his so-called Kingdom of God), how we should apply the same critical standard to the Bible we apply to any other historic work, and finally how we see ourselves, humans, as part of this world, sharing responsibility for that which we are part of.

But these are not rules, not something we must abide by or else. These are guidelines for a creative community life. Compared to the strict commitments required by some other religions, perhaps we should describe the Templer belief

as a belief with a small “b” instead of a capital “B” Belief, like the difference between everyday faith and The Faith (in capitals) of the catholic literature. Or better perhaps “believe” as in something that we do, rather than “belief” as in something we have. Our constitution specifies a member of the Temple Society as someone who has declared to: conduct himself in a manner in conformity with the aim of the TSA (this means in essence the philosophy statement just mentioned), participates in the communal life of the TSA, pay the annual subscriptions and generally observe its constitution.

It looks like we Templers fall into the no-mans-land between the so-called true believers, those who faithfully confess to a world-religion, regardless of ecological or scientific conflicts, and the professed Nonbelievers, the skeptics, those who pride themselves on their freedom from commitments. A no-mans-land without preconceived definitions and instructions for life’s deeper mysteries, the why and the how we came to be in this world, the measure of our conscience, of death and thereafter, the meaning of creation and free will. A no-mans-land suitable for those only who want to have a foot in both camps. A terrain without shelter against the harsh wind of reality, exposed to lethal criticism from both camps, a no-mans-land into which we have trouble enticing new members from either the Believers’ or the Nonbelievers’ camp. This is, I believe, how we are actually seen by a large part of the population, sort of like half-way there, half empty - half full, and it is up to us to change this image. We have to demonstrate that our position, far from being one of passive indecisiveness, is, in its freedom from the constricting bias of convention, leading the way in an effective use of all available human resources towards a fuller realisation of man’s creative potentials.

We experience this freedom from enforced religious conformity, from the capital “B” Belief, daily. Each one of the Temple Society Elders is encouraged to speak freely on anything that concerns the community, on religion the way we see it, on social issues in the news, on evolution in biology, technology and philosophy in a scientific or humanitarian way, and use Bible texts and references as a fitting guide to give structure to the Sunday Service. It is part of our way of life so much we hardly notice it anymore, unless pointed out to us by others. What Templers believe is not tied to the written word, and our criteria for a good Templer is beyond religious conformity. A little anecdote may help to show what I mean.

Earlier this month we bid farewell to Walter Burkhardt who died on July 6th, aged 67 – may he rest in peace. Walter, throughout his life, has served the Temple Society in many ways. His services to Tabulam and the Altersheim are perhaps the best known, only because his name has for such a long time been almost synonymous with it. He was also an Elder of the Society. Now one Sunday in Bayswater, the text for his Service was the little story about the swine and the legions of evil spirits. It is told several times in the Bible, in Matthew 8, Mark 5 and again in Luke 8. Jesus, who had just crossed the stormy sea of Galilee from Capernaum in a small boat, is confronted by a demonised man. Jesus cures him by driving out the evil spirits, which promptly pass into a nearby herd of swine. The swine then, in their madness ran into the sea and unfortunately all two thousand of them drown. This understandably made the owners of the herd rather unhappy

and they asked Jesus to leave immediately. I remember Walter, after reading this text from the Bible, paused for a while, took a deep breath and in his distinctive sonorous voice said: 'I can't talk about that, it makes no sense to me at all. Lets talk about something else'. And so he did. He talked about life as he knew it.

Here was a man, genuine in his feelings of what made sense to him, whether it was in religion or social justice. He did not pretend to believe for belief's sake. And at his funeral service in the Community Chapel Bayswater the building could not hold all the people who came to pay their final respects.

I see the religious belief the Templers hold and practice more as a measure of doing the seemingly right thing at the right time. It is not a belief in the letter of the scripture nor in outdated practices. It is a belief that comes from the confidence the nature of life brings with it. I would call it a natural belief in contrast to the other, artificial Belief. Natural, because life without it would not be possible. It is the trust in a reasonable permanence of things as they are, needed as a precondition to life on Earth and to its evolution. It is a belief that could have started as the survival instinct in our primitive early animal history. When you see a little newborn lamb standing alone in a grass paddock, unsteady on its still wobbly feet, blaring its plaintive cry into the cold and strange air, you guess, – you believe, there is a mother sheep close by, just as the young lamb knows or "believes" its need for food and companionship will most likely be satisfied. Because if the system did not work, had not worked like this for ages, there would be no sheep around to tell the story. But transplanted suddenly into a different environment with no mother sheep the lamb's instincts would let it perish.

We humans have lost many of the instincts essential for animal survival. I think this was because they were unsuitable for the environment we found ourselves in, the environment we created for ourselves. We have lost the instincts that were restrictive in the evolution of our consciousness. Instincts hard-wired in the genes are not suitable for survival in a rapidly changing environment. Examples of situations where remnants of instinctive fear and panic in a shocked crowd can cause horrendous casualties, demonstrate this clearly. I see our ability to belief as a modern version of instinct, something we can consciously modify to suit a changing reality, and yet still persuasive enough for our body to accept as a physical necessity. Make no mistake about it, belief can be powerful. They can be strong enough people are prepared to suffer physical hardship and sometimes even die for it. Belief still has the instinctive ability make it possible for the mind to live with an awareness of an uncertain future. Like in the situation with the lamb mentioned before, there may be foxes or eagles about, threatening its survival any moment, but your belief, based on experience, on statistical information, even on wishful thinking, will give the lamb a reasonable chance of survival.

We watch the sun set in the evening and call it a day, and in the belief there will be a tomorrow, make preparation for the next day. We sow seeds in our garden in the firm belief they will germinate in a few days, we water the seedlings and cultivate them in the hope and the belief we will gather the harvest in time. – My uncle Erich Herrmann who, when asked what he believed in, defined

his *Glauben* in his characteristic way as: *“I glaub das drei Pfund Rindfleisch a gute Sup machet.”* (I believe that three pounds of prime beef will make a nourishing broth). He was a man with an uncanny gift for growing things. He did not like being called a gardener, he was a horticulturalist. He pruned fruit trees to an ergonomic shape to produce the best possible fruit, he crafted roses and propagated bushes with a confidence that could only have come from a firm belief in his own ability. He could watch you carefully tend to a sickly looking plant and then, in his broad Waiblinger Schäubisch would say: *“da hilft alles bedda nix, da muaß mischt na”*. (loosely translated as, sometimes a load of manure will do more than the most fervent prayer.) He died many years ago, no doubt happy amongst all the apple trees in the gardens of heaven. His wife Else still lives in the Altersheim.

I keep coming back to something Peter Uhlherr said more than 10 years ago: Although the Templar aim has always been, and still is, spiritual, the method of realising this aim has always been, and still is, intensely practical.

I wholeheartedly agree. Let us be practical in our belief, too. Let us recognise the distinction between a belief as an institution and a belief as a choice. An “instituted belief” is something you have to conform to, regardless whether you know it has no intrinsic value beyond that of a dogmatic ritual. Your scientific awareness may even tell you that to confess to such a belief in this day and age is wrong, dogmatic practices may force you to do so. This is the belief Anne Eckstein was referring to when she said she was not a *Beliefer*. It usually thrives on traditional sentiment, intellectual apathy and ignorance. – After the war as a youngster I lived in a village near Stuttgart for a while, and when area rationalisation swept through the agricultural communities of Germany (*Flurbereinigung* it was called) a lot of the small country roads were re-routed, hills levelled and valleys filled, to consolidate land holdings. Anyway, there is this little story of an old farmer with his helper on a horse-drawn waggon driving out to his paddock. They got onto one of the new stretches of road and, as he was used to from the past when this road used to go through a ditch, the farmer pulled on the brake. The helper pointed out to him there was no need to brake here anymore because the road had been graded and levelled. The farmer replied: *“I brems wo mei vaddr bremst hat, on wenns berguf geht”*. In short, “I stick with tradition, no matter what”. The “belief as a choice” though, has nothing to do with ignorance or compulsion. It is an awareness that in most situations, and that includes religion, our choice of action under given circumstances is based on our belief that what we are doing is the right and proper thing to do. In other words, I see the Templar belief manifested in our actions and our deeds, in what we decide to do in the full awareness of social, cultural, environmental and scientific facts, to the best of our ability.

And if there is more than one way to do a specific job, we believe in letting those people do it who have the greatest motivation towards the project. In this spirit we believe all our individual striving will lead our community towards the condition on Earth we Templars like to summarise in the expression “the Kingdom of God”.

To conclude we will sing the hymn “Nun danket alle Gott...”, all 5 verses

Before you leave I would like to mention a couple of upcoming astronomical events, one of them may well alter how mankind sees itself in the Universe. Those of you who try to keep up with space news will probably know that in 2003 the twin probes, Spirit and Opportunity with their six-wheeled Mark-2 Rovers are heading towards Mars. They will try to settle once and for all the long-standing controversy over water (and life) on the planet. If the building blocks of life exist in interplanetary space and there is (or was) water on Mars, then its surface should show some early signs of life's evolution. The two probes will arrive on Mars in December/January respectively. We should know the answer shortly after.

The other event is a remarkable encounter between Earth and Mars. On August 28 this year Mars will be "only" 55,758,006km (0.373 AU) from Earth, closer than it has ever been for the last 100,000 years - and will be until the year 2284. It's disk will have an angular diameter of 25.1 arc-seconds and a brightness magnitude of minus 2.9. If you have the opportunity to look at Mars with its two moons next month please do so, it is the best view anyone will have of Mars from Earth, ever, and it will give new meaning to this war God of old and his two chariot horses Phobos and Deimos, Fear and Panic.

Mars takes some 687 days to orbit the sun (a bit under 2 Earth years) so oppositions, when the two planets pass each other on their race around the sun, occur approximately every 780 days. Due to the great eccentricity of the Mars orbit the distance between them at opposition varies from orbit to orbit. A favourable oppositions occurs when Earth and Mars line up on the same side of the sun during the Mars perihelion (it means closest to the sun) once every 15 to 17 years. But because the Earth orbit is also not round a further variable arises, which I am told, happens to make the coming opposition in the latter part of August the closest confrontation between the two planets, for thousands of years.

SAAL IM GEMEINSCHAFTS ZENTRUM BAYSWATER

SONNTAG 29. JUNI;

Musik Elisabeth Wagner

Willkommen alle miteinander zum Templer Saal am letzten Sonntag des Monats; am Ende des Geschäftsjahres; die Zeit wenn der Staat den Schlußstrich unter die Finanzen des Jahres macht und seinen angemessenen Zehnten unseres Einkommens verlangt. Wie Wilhelm Busch so schön kurz gefaßt über die Bilanz sagt: Ob ein Minus oder Plus verblieben zeigt der Schluß.

Aber heute am hellichten Sonntag wollen wir uns nicht mit Alltags-Sorgen befassen, sondern unseren Gedanken freien Lauf lassen durch Gottes wundersame Natur und über Gott und die Welt reden.

Zu Beginn singen wir den Choral Nummer 70 im Hymnbook "Mit dem Herrn fang alles an..." , alle drei Verse.

Wie schon im Juni Templer Record angesagt, wird der heutige Gottesdienst in Deutscher Sprache gehalten und ich freue mich so viele Leute vom Altersheim begrüßen zu dürfen. Es ist eine schöne Gewohnheit, daß man sonntags in den Saal geht und gemeinsam sich erfreut. Irgendwie spürt man, daß dieses Kaleidoskop der sonntäglichen Gefühle eine Farbenpracht in unser Leben bringt die einem gut tut.

*Wir sind es die die Welt beseelen – denn um uns her muß Leben sein,
Wir sind des Frühlings helle Boten, – und lieben uns den heitren Schein
So drehn wir uns in ew'ger Jugend – und sind dabei wo man sich freut.
Und läßt der Kaiser sich verehren – wir leihen ihm die Herrlichkeit.*

(Das Turandot Rätsel, wer sind wir? die Antwort ist, die Farben!)

Weltweit ist es der Brauch daß ein Tag in der Woche zur geistigen und körperlichen Entspannung eingelegt ist, wobei im Rahmen von Religion über höhere Ideale gesinnt und gesprochen wird. Aber warum tun wir das? Warum sagt man, das ist schön? Weil eine besinnliche Pause im Alltags-Lebens für Leib und Seele der Menschen unentbehrlich ist? Warum heißt man es dann Gottesdienst? Christoph Hoffmann, in unserer Templer Bibel "Occident und Orient" drückt es etwa so aus: 'Gott, der jedermann Leben und Odem allenthalben gibt, bedarf keines Dienstes von seiten der Menschen; er bedarf ebensowenig unserer frommen Gesinnung als unserer etwaigen äußeren gottesdienstlichen Handlungen. Der Zweck und Wert alles menschlichen Gottesdienstes besteht folglich nur in der Wirkung die derselbe auf den Menschen selbst, auf die Hebung und Verbesserung seines inneren und äußeren Zustandes ausübt.'

Soweit Hoffmanns Einleitung zum Kapitel "Der Gottesdienst", in 1875. Das ist eine sehr drastische Lehre, deren Folgerungen man sich immer wieder vorsagen muß. Hoffmann sagt hier eindeutig, daß der tiefe Wert aller Templer Saale, und das gilt auch für den heutigen Saal, alleine in dem liegt, daß der Einzelne sich innerlich angeredet fühlt und gehoben wird. Kein Gottesdienst, keine Gottesanbetung, es geht um uns, uns persönlich und unser Verhalten zu unseren

Mitmenschen. Es dreht sich um die Hebung und Verbesserung unseres geistigen und körperlichen Wohlbefinden. Die Versammlung im Gemeindesaal soll das verantwortliche Handeln im Alltag fördern und der Besinnung auf das Ziel unseres Strebens dienen. Das ist der schönste Liebesdienst den wir Gott bereiten können. Hoffmann sagte so vor 128 Jahren.

Wenngleich Christoph Hoffmanns Gedanken weit dem religiösen Niveau seiner Zeit voraus waren, war ihm doch die biblische Wahrheit unbestreitbar, und dieser einleitende Satz, seine Auslegung dieser "Wahrheit", ein Jahrhundert vor der Zeit. Seine Berechtigung trotzdem einen Gottesdienst zu halten sieht er in dem Vergleich mit der Freude von Eltern an ihren Kindern, wobei die Eltern, obgleich sie der Liebesdienste ihrer Kinder nicht benötigen, sich über deren Anerkennung freuen.

Diese Templer Philosophie ist heutzutage nicht mehr so außergewöhnlich wie sie es zu Hoffmanns Zeiten gewesen sein mag. Radio und Television, Buchauswahl sowie kultureller Einfluß von Touristen und Migranten hat die einst strengen Schranken der Welt-Religionen gelockert und eine gegenseitige Anpassung möglich gemacht. Keine der Konfessionen behauptet heute noch, daß sie die einzig-selig machende, die einzig richtige Lehre sei. Wohl die Beste, aber nicht die Einzige. Auch die Templer Philosophie ist diesem Wechsel ausgesetzt. Geistige Weiterentwicklung bedeutet Veränderung, und ein wirklichkeitsnaher Glaube muß offen sein für Fortschritte und äußere Gegebenheiten, sowie dem Vergleich mit anderen Religionsphilosophien.

Als religiöse Gemeinschaft nimmt die Tempel Gesellschaft heut-zutage aktive teil in einem Gedanken-Austausch Programm mit anderen Religionen. Schon längere Zeit macht Bentleigh regelmäßig bei der Glen Iris Ministers Association mit, und etliche sogenannte Ecumenical Meetings haben stattgefunden, sogar in der Bentleigh Halle. Anfangs dieses Monats waren Dr Rolf Beilharz und ich als Templer Älteste bei einer Islamischen Seminar-Sitzung im Civic Centre der City of Knox eingeladen. Zwei Vertreter der lokalen Moslem Gruppen gaben der Versammlung einen Überblick über den Islam. Sie erklärten was der tiefere Sinn der Religion des Propheten Mohammeds ist, und was davon in der Praxis nur von oberflächlicher Bedeutung ist oder lokale Ritualen sind, wie es sie wohl in allen Religionen gibt. Nicht zu verwundern ist nun daß in der modernen Erklärung des Korans (die Bibel des Islams), der selbe Leitfaden ersichtlich ist der heute durch alle Religionen geht: Hoffmanns Suche nach einem praktischen Weg den Gottesdienst mit dem Wohl des Einzelnen in der Gemeinschaft zu vereinigen und darauf einen zeitgemäßen Sinn des Lebens aufzubauen.

Auch hier sind die neuen Auslegungen auf das weltliche Gemeinschaftswohl des Menschen, auf die kulturellen Unterschiede orientiert. Der Gottesdienst dient dem göttlichen im Menschen. Obgleich der Koran seit 1500 Jahren unverändert besteht, sind auch im Islam (der jüngsten aller Weltreligionen), Kulturen entstanden die sich im Werten der individuellen mohammedanischen Gebote unterscheiden; wie zum Beispiel Kopfbedeckung und Schleier, die Art der fünf täglichen Gebete und die Bedeutung der Jihaad, des heiligen Krieges. So wird die Jihaad einerseits als ein persönlicher, innerlicher Kampf zwischen Gemein- und Eigen-

nutz ausgelegt, (als Erziehung zur Selbstlosigkeit) dagegen noch von Vielen als Vertilgung aller sogenannten Ungläubigen auf Erden gepredigt. Im Grund genommen umfaßt das Wort Islam ein im Leben Sich-Ergeben dem Willen Gottes, das sich in fünf Geboten ausdrückt:

- Es gibt nur einen Gott, Allah, und Mohammed ist sein Prophet
- Täglich fünf mal zu bestimmter Zeit wird daran erinnert
- Die monatliche Fast-Zeit (Ramadan)
- Eine jährliche Zahlung oder Spende an die Armen
- Einmal im Leben eine Wallfahrt (Hajj) nach Mekka, im Gedenken an die Propheten.

So ist der Koran mit seiner Lehre des Islams für rund eintausend Millionen Muslims eine Anleitung zu einem sozialen Leben des Friedens.

Jede praktische Religion ist letzten Endes ein Kompromiß. Ein Mittelweg zwischen einem Idealzustand und dem Erzielbaren. Brigitte Hoffmann, Gebietleiter in Deutschland, in der April Warte schreibt: 'Alle historische Erfahrung und alle psychologische Erkenntnis spricht dafür, daß es einen Zustand der vollkommenen Harmonie auf Erden nicht geben kann. Die meisten Konflikte zwischen Menschen und Völkern entstehen nicht aus bewußter Bosheit, sondern daraus daß Menschen verschieden sind, verschiedene Bedürfnisse haben und verschiedene Ansichten vertreten was gut und was schlecht sei'. Ein Kompromiß nicht nur weil wir Menschen imperfect sind und unser Verständnis deshalb dem Idealzustand unzulänglich ist, sondern weil solch ein Zustand tatsächlich naturwidrig ist. Stell dir vor eine Welt ohne Extreme, kein himmelhoch jauchzen, kein zum Tode betrübt, kein Heiß und kein Kalt, Jung und Alt, Laut und Leise, Tag und Nacht, Arbeit und Ruhe; ohne Tod gäbe es kein Leben, ohne Kontrast kein Wachsen, keine Entwicklung, keinen Erfolg. Die Natur liebt die Mannigfaltigkeit.

Ich erinnere mich wie die Araber in Palästina oft auf eine Beschwerde dass die Qualität ihrer zum Kauf angebotenen Waren unverlässlich war – große und kleine Oliven gemischt, reif und grüne Bananen untereinander, die schönen Tomaten oben im Korb – als Antwort die Hand hoben mit gespreizten Fingern und sagten, siehe meine Hand, Allah gab mir fünf Finger, keine zwei davon sind gleich, und doch sind sie alle perfekt. Oder nicht?

Es ist schwer gegen solche Logik zu argumentieren. Es leben sechtausend Millionen Menschen auf Erden, keine zwei davon sind exakt gleich. Ist einer dieser Billionen Individuellen perfekt? Sind sie alle perfekt? Oder keiner?

Wir singen jetzt den Choral Nummer 42 im roten Gesangbuch "Herr dir ist niemand zu vergleichen..." die Verse 1 & 6

Das Ziel unseres Strebens, das Trachten der Templer Gemeinde, die Vision Hoffmanns, ist das Königreich Gottes auf Erden. Für alle Schritte die wir tun oder unterlassen, soll uns die Verwirklichung dieses Ideal-Zustandes die Richtlinie geben. All unser Sinnen und Trachten nach harmonischem Gemeindeleben, ist gedacht uns diesem Ziel näher zu bringen. "Trachtet zuerst nach dem Reich Gottes

und nach seiner Gerechtigkeit, so wird euch zufallen wessen ihr bedürft". Dieser Leitspruch steht dort an unserer Tempelwand für jedermann zu sehen. Aber was heißt das? Wie würden sie das auf gut schwäbisch sagen? Brigitte Hoffmann sagt klipp und klar daß das traditionelle Bild vom Reich Gottes falsch ist. Christoph Hoffmanns Idee war, durch Anleitungen und Förderung des Lebensstandards im Gemeindeleben die Vor-Bedingungen zu so einem Reich zu schaffen, sodaß zur gegebenen Zeit (ursprünglich die Wiederkehr Jesus) das Reich Gottes anbrechen kann. Er ging sogar so weit, daß für ihn der ideale Platz dieser Mustergemeinde (und somit der Bau des Tempels) in Palästina / Jerusalem war. Aber er hat in seinem tätigen Leben tatsächlich diesen Spruch vom Reiche Gottes umgedreht. Er hat ihn in dem Sinne angewandt wie ich denke er sollte eigentlich verstanden sein: **Trachtet am Ersten nach allem Andern (einer rechtschaffenen Lebensexistenz und Gerechtigkeit unter den Menschen) so wird euch das Reich Gottes von selber zufallen.** Es wird in eurem Streben nach diesen Vorbedingungen erfüllt sein (euch zufallen).

Weder Jesus noch das Alte Testament haben je solch ein irdisches Reich Gottes vorausgesehen; Hier, bei Hoffmann, finden wir eine Weiterentwicklung, eine Evolution der Originalvision vom Reich Gottes als Himmel auf Erden. Hoffmann sorgte zuerst dafür daß in dem neuen Lande die notwendigen Lebensbedingungen zu einem erfolgreichen Anfang und zum Aufbau gegeben waren. Wir wissen zum Beispiel, daß die voreiligen Siedlungsversuche in 1867 – wo Templerfamilien (bevor Hardegg und Hoffmann soweit waren) auf eigene Faust nach Palästina zogen – schwerem Schicksal erlagen. In der Kolonie Samunieh, am Westabhang der Hügel von Nazareth, starben in einem Jahr 15 Personen durch Krankheit, Mangel an Fürsorge und Organisation. Christoph Hoffmann baute die Palästina Templer Gemeinde auf solider Basis, sorgte für Gerechtigkeit und trachtete nach all dem was menschlich möglich war, und starb, immer in dem Glauben und der Hoffnung, daß das Reich Gottes ihm doch noch zufallen würde.

Wer kann sagen, daß es nicht schon da war? Die Nature des Reich Gottes findet sich im Tun und Werden, nicht im Sein. Doch solch eine Weltanschauung war damals noch verfrüht

Im Rückblick haben Templers viel in Palästina geleistet. Und viel von der heutigen Anerkennung ihrer Leistungen dort ist auf ein beispielhaftes, ein fast schöpferisches Gemeindeleben zurück-zuführen. Sie haben mit Fleiß, Ausdauer und Geschäftstüchtigkeit sieben Gemeinde-Siedlungen zur Blüte gebracht (Kolonien nannte man sie im Zeitalter der Missionare und der Kanonenboote). Und dies in einem Land das zuvor als hart, unfruchtbar, verseucht und grausam verrufen war. Sie schufen den Beweis dafür, daß Palästina bebaut und besiedelt werden kann und gründeten Farmen, Schulen, neue Industrien; kurz, eine ganze neue Wirtschaft kam ins Dasein. Peter Uhlherr sagt im Juni Leitartikel, wengleich das Ziel des Tempels immer geistig verstanden wurde – und noch immer so verstanden wird –, war der Weg zur Erreichung dieses Zieles stets ein praktischer.

Wenn ich hier im Saal die vielen bekannten Gesichter sehe kommt mir wieder zum Bewußtsein wie vielseitig doch die menschliche Begabung ist: Der macht das, die ist gut in dem, hat net die Familie des g'stified? von dene kommt des, die

waret dort dabei, die hat des zusammengestellt, geschrieben, organisiert, gemalt. – Mit persönlicher Eigenheit und Talent, mit dem was sie gerne tun, tragen alle zum Fortbestehen unserer Gemeinschaft bei. Jeder Mensch hat etwas zu geben. Das Geheimnis einer guten Templer-Gemeinde ist nicht daß alle am gleichen Strang ziehen, sondern daß eines jeden Gabe sinnvoll in die Struktur des Tempels eingefügt wird. Sei es der Hände Arbeit, Hilfe in der Not, eine geistige Anregung oder Beteiligung an einer Veranstaltung, ein freundliches Wort oder auch nur ein lächelnder Gruß; ein Jeder trägt auf seine Art, zu seiner Zeit, zur Entfaltung des Gemeindesinnes bei.

Diese Vielseitigkeit stellt aber auch Forderungen an unsere Vorstellung von dem was eine Gemeinde ist, oder sein soll. Die heutige soziale Kultur, wo ein enges Zusammenleben nicht mehr absolute Vorbedingung ist -- in der man leben kann wo man will und wie man will – bringt mit ihrer Freiheit ein merkbares Maß von Isolierung mit sich. Anstatt daß man sich zu einer Haus- oder Auto-Reparatur ein Werkzeug beim Nachbarn entlehnt, fährt man zu Bunnings und kauft es sich halt; oder noch einfacher, man nimmt das Mobile aus der Tasche und ruft "Jims Handiman" an. Man sieht heute schon, daß in absehbarer Zeit ein drittel aller Australier für sich alleine leben werden. Bevor sie alle den Kopf schütteln über diese eingebildeten reichen Leute, denken sie mal kurz nach, warum macht eigentlich unser Altersheim eine 6 Millionen Dollar Neubau-Erweiterung? Ganz richtig, weil eben jeder Resident heute unbedingt sein Einzelzimmer haben muß. Meines Erachtens ist dies eine Tendenz die auch in unserer Templer Religionsphilosophie beachtet und erfaßt werden muß. Es ist eine Entwicklungsstufe der Originalidee Hoffmanns, wo aus einer geschlossenen Gemeinde mit traditionellem Gemeindeleben etwas Neues entstehen will: Eine offene Gemeinde, ohne Zaun und ohne Grenze; ein Tempel dessen Gemeinschaftssinn nicht alleinig auf dem physikalischen Kontakt zwischen Mitglieder beruht sondern ein Tempel der auf einer geistigen, einer intellektuellen Ebene die Idee vom Reich Gottes weiter trägt, pflegt und entfaltet. Wir sind auf dem Weg zu einer Gemeinschaft die weder durch körperliche Behindernisse noch physikalische Entfernung über Land und Meer beschränkt ist, einer Gemeinschaft deren Größe und Vielfalt keine Grenzen gesetzt sind. Ein jeder kann auf seine Art, mit seinem Talent zum gemeinsamen Streben nach dem geistigen Ziel beitragen. Wie Peter Uhlherr so schön sagt, wir müssen in unserem Trachten nach dem Reich Gottes den sozialen, naturwissenschaftlichen, technischen und ethischen Veränderungen in unserer Umgebung Rechnung tragen.

Die Zielvorstellungen des Gründers hinsichtlich des Orients sind durch die geschichtlichen Ereignisse inzwischen überholt worden und für uns heute nicht mehr relevant. Wichtig aber ist, daß sein bahnbrechender Tempel Geist weiter besteht, und zwar in einer Form die Sinn und Nutzen für die Zukunft hat. Das bedeutet eine dauernde, wirklichkeitsnahe Beschäftigung mit unserem Glauben, und eine regelmäßige Überholung in der Art wie wir unsere Philosophie und die Kultur unseres Erbgutes weiter verbreiten. Der Erfolg und der Fortbestand der Templer Gemeinde liegt meiner Ansicht nach größtenteils in unserer Anpassungsfähigkeit, beschwingt durch unsere dogma-freie Religionsphilosophie und eine ungebun-

dene, rituallose Gottesdienstordnung.

Wenn wir uns also am Sonntag beim Gottsdienst treffen, und mit Worten menschlicher Unzulänglichkeit nach dem Sinn dieses Dienstes fragen so wollen wir Gott danken, daß er uns die Gabe gegeben hat darüber nachzudenken; daß er uns das Bedürfnis gegeben hat mit Bausteinen unseres Sinnen, Denken und Dichtens am Bau des Tempels mitzuwirken, sowie die Freude daran diesem Sinnbild vom Reich Gottes auf Erden eine uns begreifliche Form und Wirklichkeit zu schaffen.

Die Geschichte des Tempels ist eine reiche Lehre in der Suche nach einer irdischen Verwirklichung von der Vision Jesus, dem Reich Gottes unter den Menschen. Möge in unserem Tun und Schaffen Gottes schöpferischer Geist in uns zum Ausdruck kommen. So können wir getrost in dem Vertrauen auf unseren Mitmenschen Sein Handwerk erkennen.

Wir singen zum Schluß das Lied Nummer 126 im roten Gesangbuch "Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte..." die Verse 1,2 & 6.

Jetzt wünsch ich euch noch einen recht schönen Sonntag und hoffe euch bald mal wieder zu sehen. Bitte bleibt noch sitzen und laßt Elisabeth Wagner mit ihrer Musik den heutigen Saal vollenden.

SAAL SUNDAY 11 JULY 2004 IN BAYSWATER 15:15

followed by community discussion
Music Christa Imberger

Hymns: 1) Number 47 "Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund..." v 1,2,3,4 and 6.
2) Number 64 "Lobe den Herren..." verses 1,2,3 and 4

A Good Afternoon to you all.

The text for today comes from the book of Job, the most faithful servant of God, as the Bible calls him. Our opening hymn "Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund" symbolises the faith of Job, the trust he had in a just and kind God watching over him and guiding his every step. "Thou art the fount of grace, I know, and spring so full and free, whence saving health and goodness flow each day so bounteously". It is a simple, childish uncomplicated belief, and that's wherein its beauty lies. Let us start this morning's service with singing that Hymn, number 47, "Ich singe dir..." verses 1,2,3,4 and 6 (note there is no 5)

The belief in a higher consciousness controlling events in our lives is deeply ingrained in mankind. It is so fundamental in our everyday activity and our social interaction, we often don't recognise it until pointed out to us. For such an aptitude to be in the human genome there must be (or must once have been) an evolutionary benefit arising from it, such as feeling safe in a fundamentally hostile environment. While we now know the physics of the forces involved in making the sun rise in the morning, making the clouds move, the rain fall and the lightning strike, we still have the need to believe, way beyond any scientific facts, in an environment responding to our personal needs.

There is a little story of a farmer and his field of wheat that illustrates this simple trust in the fundamental goodness of nature. It goes like this: A farmer had sown down a field with wheat; he watched the seed sprout and come up, took joy in the lush green growth of the blades and watched in anticipation the ears develop and the seeds swell and ripen as summer approached. Then one fine Sunday morning, shortly before harvest time, he went for a stroll with his young daughter out to the field where to his horror, instead of the golden waves of corn he expected, he saw a sea of undulating bright blue before him. Weeds had come up and overnight burst into flower all over in-between the blades of corn, almost covering it. Corn flowers! How could this happen to him. He had been so careful in selecting his seeds, in cultivating the field and fertilising it properly. This must be the work of the devil. Only a terrible enemy could have played such a costly prank on him.– For those of you without a farming background, corn flowers are a serious weed infestation in cereal crops that can drastically reduce the harvest yield. Something like Paterson's Curse here in Australia. – As he stood there, contemplating his misery and what he had done to deserve this, he suddenly heard his girl shouting joyfully from a distance, and looking around he saw her skipping

wards him waving a huge bunch of the blue corn flowers she had just picked. "Look father look", she shouted, "look at all this heaven-like beauty, surely God himself must have made it for us".

I like the story. It is refreshing for the soul if you can see a bit of good in everything. It is easier, of course, if your livelihood does not depend on it. I had the pleasure of sitting in on the Ruff's family service a couple of weeks ago in Bentleigh, listening to a pictorial presentation of the story of the lost sheep. Woolly critter-pictures, each marked with the name of one of the Sunday School kids attending the Service, were stuck all over the wall and one of them would now and again "get – lost". The kids loved it, but it made me think, at what age should a person see more behind the story of the wayward son than the joy of finding a lost sheep. When should the realisation hit home this is not a game of hide and seek, but a serious attempt to teach us greater awareness of an individual's responsibility for himself and towards society. That is, finding a mutually acceptable way of not getting lost! For the joy for the shepherd in finding a lost sheep diminishes rapidly as more and more sheep are lost. – I have spent a fair number of my early years on the land and, yes, for a time even minding sheep. And I tell you there is not much joy in store for a shepherd who repeatedly loses sheep. Either he gets the sack for being negligent, or he is just not suited to the job. So, a sheep that forever strays from the mob, or habitually gets lost, will soon finish up in a shepherd's pie.

Hulda Wagner in the July Templer Record (page 4) also points out that in real life there is often an overriding greater responsibility to protect the 99 sheep than looking for one to the extent of neglecting the other 99. At what age then should we leave behind childish speech and childlike thoughts? Is it fair to treat grown-up persons like children, by giving them childish solutions to real problems? Should we, the Elders of the Temple Society be telling you, the grown-up Templers, pretend-stories with artificially idealised solutions? My attitude to this is No, we should not. We should not insult a group of intelligent, thinking and responsible people by treating them like children in our philosophy or religion of life. I would-hate to see Templer Saals reduced to an entertainment, structured as a compromise in-between the level of children and grown-ups. In the end both will miss out on the substance they look for and need in our services. My grandchildren are fascinated by Harry Potter, I am not.

Following this service there is a discussion scheduled (after a short coffee break) where we can talk some more about this and you can share your thoughts on the subject for discussion.

Lets get back to Hiob and our text for today. It comes from Chapter 31 verses 29 to 32, and is part of Job's argument to justify his righteousness before God. It reads like this:

"Have I ever rejoiced at the destruction of him that hates me, or lifted up myself when evil found him? No, nor have I ever sinned by wishing a curse to his soul. Was there ever a guest in my house who went away hungry from the fleshpots on my table? To every stranger who sought shelter at my

house I opened the door to welcome him."

Job tries to reason out the calamity that had befallen him by listing all his good deeds and his god-fearing lifestyle: God why did you let this happen to me? Have I not always done the right and proper thing? Did I not weep with him who was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor? Job searches for answers for the (to him) unwarranted tragedies that have come into his life.

The story of Job is best known for the way misfortune befell him. The phrase "Hiobs Botschaft" (Job's News) became an idiom for terrible and shocking news, synonymous with a series of tragic events happening, one after the other. As a story it has a very disturbing theme. It shows mortal man as a mere pawn in the hands of the immortals in heaven, as the Gods settle their arguments of who's right and who's wrong in an almost sporting fashion. A setting very much like that depicted in the opening scene of Goethe's Faust (written about 1800), where the heavenly prologue is clearly based on Job, particularly chapter 1, verses 6 to 12. Here the mocking spirit of Mephistopheles is not rejected by the Lord and seems to have its role in the total order. Goethe's Pelagian view of evil comes out in more of his writings, "What we call evil is only the other side of good, the two sides of necessity belong together as a whole. Just as the torrid zone must burn and Lapland freeze in order that there may be a temperate region."

Pelagius was a theologian and leader of a 5 -century movement in the Christian Church. According to the doctrine named after him there is no original sin, and man does not need grace to avoid evil. Free will is sufficient to attain salvation. So widespread was his philosophy at that time that, when Pelagianism was finally condemned by the church in 416, nineteen bishops had to be deposed because they refused to accept the canons issued by the Council of Carthage.

The book of Job (and the Faust setting) stories' fascination lies in that they mirror the eternal problem of our intellectual existence, both as a problem and as a picture. The lesser gods, amongst them the devil, throw out a challenge to God: "People only praise you when they are well off. Take your protective hand from them and you will quickly see how they can change. They will turn against you for letting bad things happen to them." Today it would perhaps go something like this: I bet you I can make him do it; you're on, bet you, you can't. How much persecution can a man live with, or how much temptation withstand, how much suffering before he curses the creator who watches dispassionately, unfeelingly, uncaringly and seemingly oblivious of the mind-destroying pain emotional loss and bodily suffering causes us mortals. All that matters in the end is whether a man's faith in a just (and merciful?) God will survive.

If you are familiar with the story of Job you know the extend of Job's misery; but have you ever wondered how the other casualties in the story took their terrible fate? Did they really deserve to die before their time? The wife, the seven sons and the three daughters, or the 7000 sheep, the 3000 camels, the 1000 cattle, the 500 donkeys and all the servants. Did they all have to perish, just to prove a Devine point? What happened to their dreams, to their plans, their pain and to their faith? – I wonder what their word for collateral damage was then, 3000 years ago. The book of Job has many delightful passages. The lengthy

discussion Job has with his three friends who have come to comfort him in his misery is interpreted in the *“Die Gute Nachricht Bibel”* as *“Wer den Schaden hat braucht für den Spott nicht zu sorgen”*. (the nearest English equivalent is perhaps, “to add insult to injury”). And when God finally confronts Job out of a thundercloud to reasserts his omnipotence, he uses lyric phrases like: Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth; when I put the gates on the oceans. Do you know where the light was born? What is the source of Darkness? Where is the path to the rising sun and where the home whence the East-wind comes. Job finally apologises with, I have spoken unwise on a subject too high for me, and things above my understanding.

God then forgives Job and rewards him with twice as much possessions than he had before, returned his health to him, a new family and granted him 140 years of life.

The jury is still out on who in the end won that heavenly wager. Perhaps it depends on who is telling the story. Same with the story of Heinrich Faust, who also won more by royal decree than anything else. Only the devil knows what it is all about, as he murmurs to himself departing from the scene: *“Von Zeit zu Zeit sehe ich den Alten gern, und hüte mich mit ihm zu brechen. Es ist gar hübsch von einem hohen Herrn so menschlich mit dem Teufel selbst zu sprechen”*. In short, “I like it when He so nicely talks to me”.

But, yes there is a but! does all this redeeming compensation make everything all right? How do you feel about that? Does it confirm your faith in a benevolent creator? Perhaps in olden days it would have, when salvation was the ultimate and only goal worth striving for. If you care, here and now, about the suffering on this Earth, and in the realisation of our responsibility as humans towards our fellow man and the environment supporting us, the answer must be an emphatic No. It does not make it right. No dogmatic assertions will make it so. Any philosophy that settles arguments with pain and suffering, with killing and war instead of intellectual consensus should no longer be supported. The New Testament was a huge evolutionary step forward in religious philosophy, from the cruel world of the Old Testament towards a more humane vision on Earth. The mission, embodied in the man Jesus, sought was to lead by example and appeals to intellectual common sense.

The next evolutionary step is long overdue, that is to recognise that our real struggle for existence is not with each other, but with nature. A combined effort to ensure an environment that will continue to support mankind. Loving your neighbour is in itself not an achievement, but creating new ideas with him is. We should not perpetuate the attitude that physical punishment and reward is a proper way to teach. Not even dogs get trained that way anymore.

A few weeks ago I was invited by the school my grandchildren go to, to give a talk about traffic lights. A sort of “show and tell”. Ursel and I took along a set of lights for demonstration and soon were surrounded by some 30 very curious young students. I told them about the history of traffic lights, how they evolved from the policeman with his white gloves to the levered arms, to the mechanical

clock-faces on to the coded light signals. And how the motorists (and the pedestrians) took each innovation in their strides and quickly accepted the information presented in the new format. A big surprise seemed to be that inside the lantern all the lights are white, the colour comes from the coloured lens placed in front of each globe. Why can't you have just one globe (one light) then and just change the lens to change the colour. Wouldn't that be cheaper? Yes it would, but some people have a visual defect and are colour blind and so have difficulty in telling red and green apart. That's why, the world over a standard with the vertical arrangement of red as Stop, yellow as Caution and green as Go was adopted, with red at the top. The session was supposed to last 3/4 of an hour, but the teachers kept on bringing in different grades and we were there for almost three hours, and questions came thick and fast. As a closing remark I told the kids to always exercise caution when crossing the road, even when it says walk. Picture a traffic light as your conscience, it may always be there, but some people sometimes ignore their conscience, especially when there is very little traffic around.

The kids of the teacher's grade made a project out of the session and send us an almost man-sized poster as a memento and thank-you.

Some standards are inevitable whenever people (especially strangers) have to interact: standards such as language, education, sanitation, money, traffic laws and yes, moral codes. The important issue is to remember they all are here to serve a social purpose, even religion. They are all human institutions whose fundamental purpose is to promote social evolution. If incorrectly applied they can become a barrier rather than a tool for progress. As society evolves and our scientific awareness solved many of the things that puzzled the people of the Bible, it is time our social conscience evolved with it and not become hung up on 3000 year-old philosophies. History has shown, that we have the capacity to grow, grow in understanding our own motivations for good and evil and we should learn to cultivate this understanding for the betterment of society.

Is there a vision for a better society? A kingdom of God perhaps? History has also shown us it is up to us to create such a society with the god-given talent we have been given. Is it possible that we already do live in it, but just refuse to recognise it as such? Looking for the proverbial horse we are riding on. Voltaire, while at the court of Frederick the Great, wrote a satire about it, called *Candide*, in which he made fun of Leibnitz's statement, eloquently explained by Pangloss (one of the characters in the story), that we live in the best of all possible worlds.

We don't have to live in a Panglossian world to appreciate the ubiquitous nature of good and evil. But there is no getting around the fact that both are part of our lives, perhaps even an essential, creative part of it, a part we cannot (perhaps should not) just wish away. Like in the story of Job, goodness can be made to shine through. Think about it, what you call evil someone else may see as good; and vice-versa. Can you picture any action you do, which, in spite of the best intentions, does not at the same time somehow disadvantage or even hurt someone or something, somewhere? Is that the flip-side of good? The face of evolution?

Lets sing the Hymn number 64 “Lobe den Herren...” verses 1,2,3, and 4. You can sing in German or in English. “Rejoice, my heart, rejoice and sing, a cheerful trust maintain; For God, the source of everything, thy portion will remain.”

As mentioned before there will be a discussion following a short coffee break. My suggested theme for the debate is: Should normal services be deliberately structured at a level comprehensible to children?

Nota bene, It does do not mean children should not attend normal services, only that the challenges facing us are given the appropriate consideration.

NEW YEAR'S EVE SERVICE IN BAYSWATER, DECEMBER 2004

Music: Veronica Rutowicz

Hymns: No 31 "geh aus mein Herz...", verses 1,2,3 and 4;
and No 120 "von guten Mächten..."

On 26 December, the day after Christmas, some 70,000 people in South East Asia lost their lives and untold millions are homeless when a huge tidal wave, a Tsunami, devastated the area. You have probably seen the graphic pictures on TV and followed the rapidly rising death toll in the News. In the light of the massive suffering caused by the disaster I feel it would be appropriate to dedicate the collection from tonight's Service to the Disaster Relief Fund of Care Australia. The Australian Government has pledged 35 million in aid already. If you can help too, please show that you care by placing a donation in the collection boxes after the service. Thank you.

Today is New Year's Eve, the last day of the year 2004, and life goes on. Christmas has come and gone, and whatever hasn't been done by now will have to wait for 2005. At midnight the year 2004 will be filed away in the dusty archives of history. Tomorrow morning a new diary will be next to the telephone and the TSA calendar has changed from Yellow to Green.

Are you looking forward to year's end? Will it make a difference to you? A lot of people see New Year's Eve as an occasion to let their hair down and celebrate, with parties, fireworks and street dances. Let us join them in an affirmation of life as we celebrate the arrival of summer with the joyous song "geh' aus mein Herz und suche Freud", No 31 in the Templer hymnbook, verses 1,2,3 and 4.

New Year's Eve to me has always been more of a time of quiet contemplation, a time for reflection on the why, the how and the where and the meaning of it all. Why am I here, how can I understand the inscrutable ways of mother Nature, where idyllic beauty and tragic terror so often go hand in hand. Can we really celebrate New Year as an important event just because the Earth in its never-ending circle around the sun has passed a certain point in the sky; a point we ourselves have selected? After all, it's not like a birthday celebration that is based on a physical beginning. Have we today really passed a milestone in our cosmic journey? A journey to where? To success? To salvation? To peace on Earth? —

When the bell strikes the hour of midnight tonight I would like to stand outside, watch the silent star-studded sky loom large overhead and let the awe of the All-mighty flow over me. Let my mind journey out towards infinity, past the stars into the endless unknown beyond, and try to make sense of the relentless inevitability that faces us all. Making sense of a journey into infinity. — I read somewhere that's what the ultimate human society, the kingdom of God, will be like. God's kingdom is a journey,

Bishop Spong says, it is a journey without milestones or time and distance limits. You can get there only by departing, for the kingdom is not a place at all,

it is the journey itself. An odyssey of life you embark on with one crucial step.— It sounded very nice to me when I first read it, but then I started to wonder: If it is up to us individually to make the selection, how would you know when you are on the right path – or in it – or part of it. To make a difference to your life, to a community, to a society, a journey must have a common direction and a purpose. Without a sign or someone’s self-proclamation of ‘here it is, I can see it, I found the way, follow me’, how can you possibly tell one path from another and who is on it and who is not? Or do we each walk alone, to find our own kingdom of God? Do we have to burn the bridges to the kingdom behind us as we cross, or can we come and go as we please? How do you go about ‘setting your mind on the kingdom of God’? – With only the current interpretation of the Bible to guide us, there is little chance we would have more success in solving this dilemma than all the Christian generations did that tried before us, and the kingdom will forever remain the elusive hope it has been for the last 2000 years. We need to know more of what constitutes that crucial step.

For us Templers, a religious group of people whose proclaimed motto is: “Set your mind on God’s kingdom and his justice before everything else...” these are serious questions. Will our Templer vision eventually lead to tangible results or is it just a dreamy phantasy? After all, a vision should, at sometime, become more than a dream, otherwise it is plainly not good enough. – I enjoyed reading Hermann Uhlherr’s thoughts on practicalities of such a kingdom, presented in the Saal held here last month. Tonight, in the dying hours of this year, with time holding its breath in anticipation of the midnight event, I would like to look once more at those questions with you.

The essence of the Templer philosophy on the subject is published in this little golden booklet, entitled Religious Perspective. Here the emphasis is on “... a continuing perfection of humanity... and a closer relationship of people to God and to each other...” – If you were given the job to turn this philosophical statement into reality, how would you go about it? What would it need, apart from people? A healthy family life? A community environment? Creative employment with secure job prospects? Holidays? We have all that already. Has it helped us to towards “perfection of humanity...?” or a “closer relationship...”? Apparently not enough! What then is the perfection we are aiming for? There are many ways to strive for perfection, probably as many as there are people in this world, and we know it is impossible to be good at, or even trying to be good at, all the things affecting the good of humanity. No one could do it all: Feeding the starving, govern the country, curing disease, educating children, care for the elderly, the homeless, give comfort, heal the afflicted, provide jobs, care for the environment or help the endangered species. The list is endless. What then is perfection?

In the village I used to live in Germany they had an alternate saying for giving comfort to someone trying unsuccessfully to master a new job. ‘*S hat alles sei Sach, wie’s Mischladen.*’ ‘There is an art in doing any job, even carting manure’. I did get many a reprimand before I could load a cart up high without losing droppings on the road driving through the village. Perfection, like beauty, appears to be in the eye of the beholder, or in the degree of need for it at any instant. If we

have to agree on perfection first, or if only perfect people can get to enter the kingdom of God, it will forever remain a lonely place. It is in the nature of people to be different, in their likes and dislikes as well as in their perception of perfection, no matter how good their relationship to God or to each other is. We are not machines; that is what makes us human.

I do not think this type of perfection is what Jesus had in mind at all when he spoke of God's kingdom on this Earth. He welcomed all who believed in his mission, the rich and the poor, the thinkers and the doers, the sick, the lame, the illiterate as well as the tax collectors and the Pharisees. Looking to Jesus then for more guidance we find the following, collected definitions: You can not tell when the kingdom will come. No one can say 'here it is!' or 'there it is' for the kingdom of God is within you. It is a realm without social barriers or discrimination. It has no brokers, no mediators between human beings and divinity, and no rituals or rites of initiation, passage from outsider to insider, from sinner to righteous, from child to adult. It is characterized by trust in the order of our creation and the essential goodness of our neighbour.

Although Jesus seems to put the arrival of the kingdom in the future, he also says it is already among us and potentially within all of us, right now. It does not need perfection to bring it about. That is, we have been given the ability to create it (whatever it may be) at anytime we decide to do so from within ourselves.

In other words, the task for creating the social environment we would like to live in, the so-called kingdom of God, is up to us. Today's society is gradually accepting responsibility for the condition of the physical environment that supports us here on Earth. We actively reduce pollution, we manage the resources and match them to population densities. If public awareness in society can achieve all that, surely we can also accept our share of responsibility for the social conditions we would like to bring about.

High on the list of pre-requisites for the kingdom I see the last mentioned item, 'trust in a natural order and in our fellow man'. Trust is a very elusive attribute and therefore hard to define in absolutes. It can only develop with a thorough understanding of the natural order of things and an awareness of the borderline between trust and foolishness. That goes for predicting earthquakes as well as anticipating human responses. If I leave my front door unlocked when going out for the day am I promoting trust in my fellow man or am I acting foolish?

It is generally recognised today that discriminatory policies encourage violence. Such philosophies can only be overcome by recognising that all violence between humans, enemies or otherwise, is fundamentally an intellectual challenge and for that reason lends itself to consensus just as well as animosity. Physical violence between humans is a barbaric method of attempting intellectual dominance. In an ideal social environment there are no enemies. If you trust your neighbour the cause for forgiving others will disappear. But on a higher, religious level, the atonement theology constitutes a deep burden that still weighs down the Christian faith today. It even brings into question the morality of God. As we Christians tell the story of Jesus' dying for our sins, in doctrine, hymns and liturgy, we subconsciously turn God into a guilt-producing figure who tells us that our

sinfulness is the cause of the death of Jesus. That philosophy is stifling religious evolution. Forgiveness for sin, for which we pray regularly in the Lord's Prayer, is a left-over from medieval times when, with an occasional confession and a few coins, you could buy salvation for your soul and escape the prospect of eternal damnation.

Leo Tolstoy, of 'War and Peace' fame, wrote a number of books on religious issues. In 1893 he published a small book called 'The Kingdom of God is Within You'. To Tolstoy the conflict between the publicly propounded religious belief and what was generally accepted practice was an issue of deep concern. It puzzled him why none of the religious groups advocating non-violence seemed to attract a large following. Not only that, by falling out with prevailing governments on things like autonomy, tax and conscription issues, very few of these groups actually out-lived their founding fathers. Those that did, relied for their survival more on their historic novelty than on a progressive social system. Tolstoy recognized that open defiance of existing laws could not be the solution, because it insulated groups, lead to conflict, ridicule and persecution of individuals and thus created a violence of its own. He realised that in a truly humane society one has to work on minimising acts of violence and persecution by avoiding confrontations in which you could become the potential cause of violence yourself. This interpretation of a peaceful society by Tolstoy is a serious statement. It challenges the human mind to a wider awareness of the consequences of our actions. If taken to its ultimate conclusion even Jesus himself did not live up to it, that is, not being the cause of violence.

Tolstoy saw the kingdom of God in our ability to consider the repercussions of our actions on our neighbour and on society, beyond any personal feeling of right or wrong, fact or truth. To him the level to which violence in the world is reduced is the only true outward indication of the kingdom of God. I find that remarkable! Remember we are talking about the late 19 century, a time when wars were still waged with the blessing of a vengeful God on both sides. A time when Psalm 139 (the text scheduled for today) in which David prays to an omniscient God to slay the wicked and mine enemies, was still taken serious.

The God-image has evolved a long way since then. The evolution Peter Uhlherr talked about in his August Service is an on-going process, and for a large part of the population the God of today is no longer the stern father figure of yesteryear, but the Spirit that dwells within all of us. No longer in a purpose-built heaven, watching every step we take from above, surrounded by the evangelic multitude, we now search for God within ourselves, "for we are God's temple". We meet him in the spirit that motivates us; in our joy and sorrow, in our love and in our hate; he lives in our creativity, in our saying "yes" to life and its challenges, and in looking forward to tomorrow. He lives in every song we sing, in every tree we plant and in the children we raise. God grows with us, learns with us; and as we change he changes with us and with what we think and do. He is the essence of our life and how this life affects our family, our neighbour, our enemy and the environment we helped to create and maintain.

Our love and trust in God and neighbour has become one. And when we die and our bodies return to the earthy source that gave us life, the God-Spirit within

us has already spread its wings far and wide. It lives on in the ripples our existence has generated around us, propagating through the community from person to person and contributing to the evolution of society. When I came into this world the world began to shape me, play with me and teach me, and through the efforts of creating me as I am, this world will no longer be the same when I leave. If you look closely, somewhere it will have my imprint on it. Nature, society and the environment will be different with each one of us who passes through this world. **If we are fortunate with what we can do in our lifetime, lucky in what talents we are gifted with, conscientious and understanding in what we make of our life, then posterity may acknowledge that we have, with our activities in our time on this Earth, left the world a better place.**

In the twelve month since December last year, 22 of our Templers and friends in Australia have left our world. As an enduring gesture of respect would those of you who can, please rise whilst I read out their names:

- Gudrun Gollong
- Heinz Beilharz
- Heinz Peter Faig
- Renate Helmke
- Manfred Imberger
- Annchen Kübler
- Gessje Keizer
- Ida Messner
- Gisela Beilharz
- Hans Ebe
- Hildegard Kazenwadel
- Lore Schlender
- Magda Storz
- Sigrid Ehmann
- Elfriede Hahn
- Siegfried Bieg
- Hugo Messerle
- Hartwig Gassmann
- Elfriede Imberger
- Sylke Weller
- Dietrich Ruff
- and just a few days ago Irmgard Weiss

Having passed our way on their journey through God's enigmatic kingdom here on Earth they, in passing, have left this world a better place. We extend our sincere condolences to the families. –

Please be seated. On a happier note we celebrate 10 new arrivals:

- Ella Amalia Sutterby
- Caitlin Jessica Graze
- Martin Kürschner

- Cooper Jake Wilkinson
- Isabel Joanna Bulach
- David Edward Vollmer
- Tasman Francis Christensen
- Ingrid Sansanee Asenstorfer
- Amelia Cate Conway-Anderson
- and Cooper Stephen Karl Knaub.

May God grant all of them a long, happy and fulfilled life.

I would like to come back to Dietrich Ruff for a moment. We said good bye to Dieter on the first day of this month, when Mark Herrmann held the funeral service here in this Community Chapel. Mark gave an excellent summary of Dieter's journey through life and his effects on the Temple Society. There is little I can add to that. What I would like to say though is, yes, no-one I know could hold a Service like Dieter could. He had a gift for it. Whether it was a wedding, a funeral or an ordinary Sunday Service, his talk touched everyone, every time. It was not even so much what he said, rather the way he said it. The sincerity and the clarity with which he spoke made every word special and every sentence meaningful.

Dieter had been President of the Temple Society from 1988 to 2001. One of Dieter's last official activity was the publication of this golden booklet I have mentioned earlier. Created together with Peter Lange and the Temple Society Elders, the Religious Perspective stands as a challenging legacy he left to us. In Dieter's opening words to the booklet we read: "...It embodies the essence of the Temple Society's identity, its beliefs and its practical concerns in current times... For this statement to remain relevant ... it will need to be reviewed from time to time... with new insight gained in the course of our unfolding journey of faith". Did Dieter have an answer to the question of, how to "set your mind on the kingdom of God..."? Yes! Each handshake between people, he said, opens a door to the Kingdom.

There is no doubt in my mind that this challenge of Dieter to us is a living thing, a spiritual thought become word and the word an embodiment of an idea. That, I feel, is what lifts us above being mortal. – In everything we once touched, in everyone we ever met on our journey through life, our spirit lives on. It lives on in every good deed we did, in every kind word we spoke and through each trusting hand we once offered to another person. In the way we live our lives we can best honour and praise creation and the creator. It is up to us, each one of us, to put meaning and purpose into our life, and open a door to the kingdom of God. Like we do in giving New Years Eve a major significance, even though it is just an imaginary point on an endless circle. For without such a meaning, life too is nothing more than an endless journey, going nowhere.

As the curtain now descends on the stage for 2004 let us sing together the New Year hymn, number 120 "Von guten Mächten...". Veronica will play the melody through once to give us the tune.

Thank you, Veronica, and thank you all for making this evening here in this

Templer temple a pleasure.

I wish you a happy and safe New Year holiday. May 2005 be a prosperous year for you and your families; a year full of health and happiness.

EASTER SERVICE, IN BENTLEIGH, 27 MARCH 2005

Music: Monika Strasser

Hymns: 1) Easter hymn No 88, "Ostern verkündet die Hoffnung..."
all three verses
2) No 75 "Nun danked alle Gott..." all three verses

Prelude

Text: Mat 28:1-8 The experience of the empty tomb

Today is Easter. An eventful week in the Christian calendar lies behind us; from Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph, to the Abendmahl on Maundy-Thursday and to his death and burial on Karfreitag.

Easter is one of the oldest Christian festivals. Historic records show that it was commemorated in Rom as early as 115 AD. The resurrection celebration starts a 50 day Easter period that goes to Pentecost and includes Himmelfahrt, Ascension, 40 days from now. Our text for today comes from Matthew 28, the last chapter of the Matthew Gospel, verses 1 to 8, where the two Marys visit Jesus' grave on Sunday morning and find the tomb empty. – –

The natural reaction of anyone to such news today would be to assume that the body had been removed, stolen, hidden, taken somewhere else. I suppose it was no different then. The gospel writer even tells of the security measures put in place to prevent just such an action, and then, after the fact, describes the bribing of the guards to make them say that the body had in effect been stolen. They were trying to forestall the rumour that Jesus had risen from the dead as he had hinted he would.

To us Templers the fact whether Jesus rose from the dead or not is an insignificant embellishment of his mission. An issue which does not detract one iota from the significance of the message Jesus taught during his life-time. We can recognise the significance and the value for society of the (at the time) revolutionary statements made by the man concerning love, trust and forgiveness. In fact, seen as made by a mortal man, albeit an exceptionally gifted man, the statements become so much more relevant to us than if they had been made by an omniscient deity. The same applies, of course, also to his sufferings.

For us Templers the sermon on the mount as reported in Matthew 5, 6 & 7 is Jesus' legacy to us, not the numerous wonders attributed to him by the Gospel writers and the Church. Turning water into wine, calming the stormy sea or walking on water, curing the lame, the blind and the obsessed we see as symbolic representations of mental attitudes to a specific problem at the time. But to the Church they mean everything. Their whole philosophy, their doctrine itself is built on a belief in the resurrection, on the supernatural, all conquering powers of the son of God, sent by God to save mankind. According to some church authorities Templers cannot even call themselves Christians because we do not insist on this indispensable divine requisite for membership.

So, deprived of its ecclesiastic image, its messianic overtones and stripped
My collection of Templer Services Page 109

of its artificial religious message what does the Easter period still hold for us? What is left of the magic of Easter other than chocolate eggs and an extra long-long weekend of fun in the sun? Does the story of the empty tomb still offer scope for reflection? Yes, yes and yes! It contains deep insight into human nature and encourages us to philosophise on our understanding of life.

Let us now sing the Easter Hymn number 88, all three verses

I was born in the northern hemisphere of the Earth, where Easter falls into the beginning of the year, in Spring. There, Easter symbolises the resourcefulness of Nature. The fest is a celebration of the arrival of Spring, when the days grow longer, the sunshine warmer and the Earth dresses itself up in a patchwork of green and gold. Easter there symbolises the awakening out of the depth of a winter of despair, when everything looked dead and lost and life's conflicts did not make sense anymore, when all efforts seemed futile, when struggle against the harsh, frozen wasteland was in vain. Suddenly, literally overnight, there awakens a new spirit, Spring has come, and hidden within this great recovery of nature there is a realisation of a parallel to the indomitable spirit in mankind, rising to the occasion. Each Spring is a vision greater and more beautiful than before and opens more of the future for us with meaningful challenges.

It is as though the depth of despair is after all not a bottomless pit but a stepping stone, yes, a mountain top from where, after the fog of despair has lifted, you can see further than before, look beyond the immediate problems confronting you and step over or around what seemed insurmountable only days before. You realise that the valley of the shadows, the evil and despair, the hopelessness are not in nature but within your mind alone. All you have to do is lift up your eyes from your inward sorrows and your self-pity, your despair and your anxiety, and the walls of depression will disappear. A new day is dawning, a new Spring has come and with it a new burst of energy. As you embrace it your mind will take a quantum leap forward.

To me the story of Easter in the New Testament is the story of such a great leap forward. A sudden awareness of hope. We are told of the disciple's shattered plans, their despair in the face of stark reality, and then experience with them the reawakening of creative hope. The death of Jesus seemed to be the end of his great mission. Everything had collapsed. The vision of a new Jerusalem had failed, the mission ended in disaster, the project in death. People were in hiding, afraid to show their faces or be identified as followers of Jesus lest they suffer the same fate. Was this the end? The end of all the high hopes, the visions, the joy, the future? Jesus was dead, yes, but his vision, his idea was still there, ready to come alive again in anyone willing to pick it up. The truth was still there to be told. It had lost the vitality, the charisma of a living public speaker, that was all. Maybe they were not as good as Jesus was, but could they do it? Could they carry the vision?

I have often wondered what it is that makes us humans identify an idea, a truth, a vision with a particular person. Usually, but not always, it is the originator of the idea, the person who first formed a vision into words and made it under-

standable to the wider public. It makes little difference to our approach what the nature of that idea or vision is. We could take any scientific, technological, philosophical, social or spiritual innovative idea as an example. Newton and Gravity, Darwin and evolution, Freud and Psychoanalysis, Einstein and Relativity, Karl Marx and Communism, Francis Crick and the double Helix or, if you are a music lover, Karl Haas and his Adventures in good Music.

By the way, did you know Haas died last month? He was 91 years old. His unique style of presentation gave classical music a common touch and made his program for many years the most listened to in the whole world. I wonder if someone will pick up the vision he had of introducing people to the art, the science and the philosophy that is music. Our mind seems to need a physical body to attach an abstract idea to before we can objectively consider and work with it in the real world. Maybe it is a programming deficiency in our human make-up where we, even today, are still unable to make sense of totally abstract concepts such as God, infinity, eternity or nothingness.

Many stories attest to how difficult it was in times gone by for the figure Zero and other imaginary numbers to be accepted by the public. Perhaps it is this hang-over from our primitive origin, where sight and touch first shaped mind-and-hand coordination, that still lingers below the surface in our mind. A hangover that makes us believe that we can destroy an idea if we kill the person who formulated it. Experiments with primitive animals seem to confirm this “out of sight, out of mind” concept.

But our mind does not work that way, at least not anymore. In today’s society you can not kill an idea anymore by eliminating its creator. It has a life of its own. It was Richard Dawkins who back in 1975 gave a name to the concept of a thought expressed, as something alive in its own right. Anything once spoken, written or portrayed in a socially recognisable form will persist, even when disconnected from its creator. Dawkins called this imaginary entity a Meme, a play on the words of memory and gene. Just like the gene in a seed can germinate, grow into a plant and multiply, a meme can lie dormant for a long time, but once it finds itself in a fertile environment, is recognised by a receptive mind, it too will grow and multiply and spread though-out society. That’s why an idea, once born, cannot be wished away by killing its creator.

After three days of hiding in despair the followers of Jesus lifted up their eyes, stopped wailing, looked around and noticed an open door, (as Dieter Ruff used to say) a way to continue the mission without the man. It took the finality of the tomb and the torn hands of Jesus to overcome the doubts in his followers that there is a better way and there was a need to show people that way. It did awaken in them the slumbering awareness of Jesus’ message, of something greater than physical death. Something they had not really understood when Jesus told them while he was still alive. Back then they felt it was Jesus vision, not theirs; His prerogative to preach it, to practice it. It did not matter that they did not understand what it was all about, and why they had to believe; why to believe was even more important than to know. But now, here, totally lost and afraid, they saw it, they saw the need and that they were not alone in their need. The same need is in every man,

woman and child, to believe in a future for themselves and their endeavours. It is a pre-requisite to making life liveable. It is a need as real as hunger, as pressing as the bodily necessities, as vital as the salt of the Earth: It is the freedom of belief in a meaning of life for each individual. All the cruelty and all the suffering in the world cannot diminish the measure of this need. It only reinforces it and makes the lack of it the more apparent. We are not talking here about the sacrosanct belief in the right of human life, nor liberty or happiness, but about something which may be entirely a human attribute, the need to believe in a value for yourself, of you as a person, a meaning that gives life a purpose and stimulates our mind to think positive. The philosopher Daniel Dennet in his book *Freedom Evolves* traces this need through evolution and defines it as *“the capacity to achieve what is of value to the individual...”*. The apostles saw this value centred around a God-fearing lifestyle and a belief in eternal life. In time this stepping stone became a doctrine and the reason for the need to believe forgotten. Our unique ability to reconsider what is of value to us may seem a fearful prospect to some, opening the gates to lawlessness and anarchy, but social environments tend to guide us to a stable balance between the two extremes of seeking shelter on the one side and needing elbow room on the other. We can look ahead beyond what is immediately visible, and plan for the possible beyond the automated animal instinct.

Archeologists tell us that something very special began to happen to our species around 40,000 years ago. Not so much a biological change but a change in culture. Some call it The Great Leap Forward. Earlier man-made artefacts had hardly changed for a million years. No paintings, no carvings, no grave goods and no ornamentations. After the Leap all those things suddenly appeared in the archeological records, together with musical instruments and stunning cave murals. So significant was this step in our evolution that a casual observer looking back on history in a million years from now might see our modern culture, with all its freeways, computers, supersonic planes and space exploration, as merely an afterthought to that Great Leap Forward in homo sapiens' cultural evolution 40,000 years ago. All our modern achievements, from the Sistine Chapel to General Relativity, from Bach to Bartok, could be seen as part of this same revolution that then burst forth from the earlier stagnation.

Richard Dawkins (whom we met before with the meme) in his latest book *“A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Life”* wonders about the cause of this sudden stimulation to the human mind. With no physical and biological changes evident at the time, he theorises that it could have been a seemingly insignificant trick of grammar in the primitive language of our ancestors, such as the conditional clause, which, at a stroke, would have allowed a “what if” imagination to flower in our brain. Whereas before, people could only talk about things that were there, visible in the scene before them, now referential language allowed them to use words as token of things that were not immediately present. A small step in hindsight, but it just may have been the bridge to representational art, the ability to draw a two-dimensional bison on a cave wall or recognise an abstract idea detached from its creator. In an environment of primitive mentality this truly was a miracle.

Such a miracle was also the realisation by the apostles that with their recogni-

tion of the substance of Jesus' message, Jesus effectively had returned to them, as if resurrected from the grave; real in his vision, his words and his commandments, enough so for them to suddenly understand the meaning of his mission. The abstract concepts of love and trust of God, neighbour and enemy became real to them through their awareness of the need to believe in them. And in this new-found expansion of reality their teacher had become real again; real enough to guide them for the seven weeks it took until they were confident enough to walk alone.

Has this evolutionary leap in abstract thinking, the need for a belief in a creative meaning for life, introduced a new era in human history? We know it has, but we also know it had a 2000 year long, painful struggle for understanding and acceptance, a time full of well-meaning ignorance and misrepresentation. Some of which is still with us today.

Bishop Spong, who has written many books on practical Christianity, believes that it is not only the Roman Catholic Church but the whole Christian philosophy that is in need of serious reform. He says our faith is badly compromised by ancient tribal mentalities. In the Scriptures Christians were taught to think of themselves always in minority images, oppressed and persecuted. They were destined to be the 'saving remnant,' the 'salt of the earth' that flavoured the soup; the 'leaven in the lump' of dough that gave its yeast to the bread, the 'light of a single candle' that shined in the midst of an overwhelming darkness. Then, following Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 CE, Christianity became the dominant religion of the western world, and Christians began to feel that it was their duty to create uniformity within the church and to impose a uniform belief on those outside. Conflict arises in the world of religion whenever a system decides that it has captured the Ultimate Truth. Ultimate truth should really be classed with all the other abstract impossibilities I have listed before. It is just another form of fundamentalism. We must beware of religious fundamentalism, for it has little to do with truth, religious or otherwise. It is rather a security seeking, defence mechanism used by frightened people, and arises out of an attempt to artificially pacify our inner need for knowledge with certainty, a certainty the world will not, it cannot provide.

That is also why there is such anger in fundamentalists, as well as great hostility toward those who are not, by their definition "true believers". Bishop Spong, in talking about religious maturity, makes the point succinctly: If you attempt to convert a fundamentalist to your point of view you will not succeed, not because the arguments you use are somehow lacking in persuasiveness, but because you have failed to understand the true nature of fundamentalism, which has nothing to do with religion.

Let us sing the hymn "Grosser Gott wir loben dich..." all three verses.

It is in the nature of human self-consciousness to seek the source of our life. That experience is so deep that I am not sure there is such a thing as a nonreligious human being. Some may reject a particular religious content but none that fail to raise the ultimate questions that create our various religious answers. Yes, the track of religious progress in the last 2000 years is difficult to define. But then,

who are we to say. Cultural evolution took 40,000 years from cave paintings to computers. The flight of a butterfly in the air is most erratic and yet, there too is meaning and purpose in its path. Christoph Hoffmann's original vision of a Reich Gottes in Jerusalem has also evolved erratically in the 140 since then, sufficiently so to be still relevant to us as an attitude to life, a journey of discovery. Today we realise, at least I think we Templers have realised, that Christianity for its survival does not need such wonders as a virgin birth for a joyous Christmas or the cruelty of a crucifixion to contemplate compassion, nor a bodily resurrection for a Happy Easter or a Pentecostal ascension of Jesus for our belief, anymore.

That to me is today's message of Easter. A reminder not to lose sight of our most precious endowment, a gift God gave to humanity that enables us to visualise something, a better world, beyond the immediate presence. A belief in the power of our mind, forged by millennia of evolution, to cope with the physical adversities of nature and the cruelty of natural selection and make disasters into stepping stones to a better understanding. The disciples did it. We would not be here were we not similarly equipped to live with them.

Music Monika Strasser.

The proceeds of today's collection is dedicated to the Borromäer Sisters in Jerusalem. Thank you all for sharing this morning with me. A special thank you to the Bentleigh kids for handing out the chocolate Easter egg surprises. I wish you a happy and safe Easter time.

2005, 3 JULI SAAL IN BAYSWATER

Music Ingrid Lämmle/Ruff

Hymns "Lobe den Herren den mächtigen König..." No 64, Verse 1-4;
"The Lord is my Shepherd..." No. 113, Verse 1 und 5;
"Brüder singt ein Lied der Freude..." No 17, Verses 1, 2 & 3.

"Gottes Hoheit und die Würde des Menschen" ist die Überschrift von Psalm 8, dem Losungstext für heute. Hier wird der menschlichen Würde, und den zerbrechlichen Händen des Menschen, der ganze Horizont der Schöpfung anvertraut, damit er deren Harmonie und Schönheit bewahre, sie nutzt, ihre Geheimnisse erschließt und ihre Möglichkeiten entfaltet. Der Psalm steht im Alten Testament und ist dem Buch der Psalmen entnommen. Die Psalmen ist ein Buch, etwa in der Mitte der Bibel, in dem Lieder und Gedichte gesammelt sind und das in Inhalt sowie in Form zu den fünf dichterischen Bücher der Bibel gehört. Die anderen in dieser Gruppe sind: Das Buch Hiobs, Das Buch der Sprichwörter, Das Buch des Prediger Kohelet, und Das Hohelied.

Längst bevor die Bibel in allgemeinen Gebrauch kam war die Sammlung der Psalmen als Gebetbuch (der Psalter) weit verbreitet. Psalter heißt man eine Serie von gefalteten Blättern (aus dem das originale Stralsund Gesangbuch wohl bestand) sowie als auch das altertümliche Instrument ähnlich einer Zither mit 8 Saiten, das zu den damaligen Zeiten das Singen von Psalmen oft begleitete. "Kommet zuhauf, Psalter und Harfe wacht auf..." sagt der Dichter in dem bekannten Lobelied.

Die Mehrzahl der Psalme (wie auch Psalm 8) stammen von König David, der ca. 1000 Jahre vor Christus lebte. Sie wurden oft vom Volk Israel gesungen, einige speziell zu besonderen Anlässen und Festen wo dann die Art der Darbietung (Instrumente und Stimmen) heute noch vorgeschrieben ist. Da das zweite Gebot ("Du sollst dir kein Bildnis machen") die darstellende Kunst innerhalb des Tempelbezirks verwehrt, wurden Poesie und Musik besonders gepflegt und die Psalmen dienten als kultische Gesänge im Tempel zu Jerusalem. Wie dort musiziert wurde, ist allerdings nicht überliefert. Mit oder ohne Instrumentalbegleitung, gemeinsam oder als Wechselgesang zwischen Gemeinde und Vorsänger – es bleibt viel Raum für Vermutungen.

Lasset uns jetzt die Lobe-Hymne singen "Lobet den Herren den mächtigen König der Ehren" Nummer 64 im roten Gesangbuch. Wir singen die Verse 1-4.

Während also die Musizierweise der Psalme im Dunkel der Geschichte bleibt, sind die poetisch bildhaften Texte bis heute erhalten. Insgesamt gibt es 150 Psalmen. Ihre herkömmliche Einteilung in fünf Bücher kommt daher, dass das Liederbuch mit dem Volk Israel und seiner Geschichte gewachsen ist und schließt sich äußerlich an die Fünf-Gliederung der Mosebücher an – Genesis bis Deuteronomium. Die fünf Bücher sind:

1. Psalm 1 - 41, hauptsächlich Gebete aus Davids "höheren" Jahren

2. Psalm 42 -72 dagegen überwiegend Psalmen aus Davids Jugend und seinem Kampf gegen Saul.
3. Dann kommen die Bücher von Psalm 73 - 89
4. und die von Psalm 90 - 106
5. und zuletzt das fünfte Buch mit Psalm 107 -150 mit Wallfahrtslieder, Festlieder, Predigt und Lob.

Bis auf das fünfte Buch der Psalmen, endet jedes Buch mit dem Vers: "Gelobt sei der Herr, der Gott Israels von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit! Amen".

Psalm 150 (am Ende des fünften Buches) ist der Schlusspunkt und endet darum mit: "Alles was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn! Halleluja!"

Die Psalmen lassen sich aber auch nach ihrem Inhalt gefühlsmäßig in verschiedene Gruppen einteilen. Wie zum Beispiel

- die Gruppe der Bußpsalmen,
- die Schöpfungpsalmen,
- die Wallfahrtspsalmen, usw.

Das ordnende Prinzip der Psalmen selbst ist nicht der Reim, sondern - charakteristisch für die hebräische Literatur - die zumeist zweigliedrige Gestaltung der Verse. So wird die Aufforderung im Psalm 103, "Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele" in der zweiten Vershälfte bekräftigt mit: "und was in mir ist, seinen heiligen Namen". Oder in Psalm acht, der beginnt mit "Herr unser Herrscher! Groß ist dein Ruhm auf der ganzen Erde!" wird bekräftigt mit "Der Glanz deiner Hoheit überstrahlt den Himmel;" und "Deine Macht ist unermesslich". Neben der Bestätigung können folgende Vers-teile auch Fortführungen oder Gegensätze beinhalten, wie Psalm 23 zeigt: "Und walli ich auch im Todesschattentale, so fürchte ich kein Unglück..." Oder wieder in acht, "Wie klein ist da der Mensch! Und doch gibst du dich mit ihm ab".

Die Benutzung von Gegensätzen betont die Extremen und steigert das Mitfühlen der Hörer. Sprachlich eindrucksvoll ist auch der stufenartige Parallelismus wie im Psalm 93, bei dem einzelne Worte beibehalten werden während die Verse einen Gedanken weiterentwickeln:

- "Mächtig ist das Brüllen des Meeres,
- Mächtiger noch sind seine Wellen,
- Doch am Mächtigsten, Herr im Himmel, bist du!"

Als geistliche Lieder des Volkes Israels schildern die Psalme selten Vorgänge des realen Lebens, sondern meist Eindrücke und Gefühle, die sich aus jenen ergeben. Sie bauen auf menschliche Grunderfahrungen wie Jubel, Trauer und Verzweiflung in der Hinwendung zu Gott. – Zorn und Hass bilden da keine Ausnahme, wie Psalm 137 zeigt: "O du verstörte Tochter Babels: Heil dem, der dir vergelten wird, was du an uns verübst!" So sangen die Juden im babylonischen Exil (oder im Gedenken an diese Zeit). Da gibt es Loblieder und Gebete in schwerer Not, Vertrauen auf Gott und Dank nach der Rettung, Wallfahrtslieder und Festliturgien, Lehrgedichte vom richtigen Leben sowie Zionslieder und Lieder des Königs und vom Ende der Gottesfeinde.

In den Psalmen reden Menschen ganz direkt mit Gott. Sie danken Gott dafür, dass es ihnen gut geht und loben die Macht und die Größe Gottes. Andererseits

steht in den Psalmen auch sehr viel über Leid, das Menschen erlebt haben und es im Gebet vor Gott bringen; aber auch, wie sie trotz der Not Gottes Hilfe erfahren haben. Oft wechselt die Stimmung mitten im Psalm. Am Anfang hört man dann zum Beispiel viel über Leid das einen Mensch bedrückt, und mitten im Psalm wendet sich die Stimmung und der Autor des Psalms beschreibt wie sich seine Situation durch die Hilfe Gottes verändert hat.

So ist in den Psalmen eine Vielzahl von menschlichen Gedanken und Gefühle enthalten die selbst heutzutage, im Spannungsfeld zwischen natürlicher Evolution und christlichem Glauben, dazu anleiten in schwierigen Situationen auf Gott zu vertrauen.

Die christliche Kirche griff die Lob- und Klagelieder ihrer jüdischen Umgebung auf; Psalmverse oder ganze Psalmen wurden Bestandteile der frühchristlichen Gottesdienstordnungen (Liturgien). Dies gilt auch für die Cantica, Gesänge außerhalb des Psalters, die aber inhaltlich und formal den Psalmen gleichzustellen sind (wie das Magnifikat, der "Lobgesang der Maria" in Lukas 1, 46 - 55).

Während der weiteren Geschichte der christlichen Kirche hatten die Psalmen immer eine besondere Rolle, als private Glaubensäußerung einerseits und im Gottesdienst andererseits. Der Reformator Calvin, der den wachsenden Einfluss der weltlichen Musik in der Kirche fürchtete, schrieb über die Psalmen: "Darum, wir mögen suchen wo wir wollen, wir werden keine besseren und dazu geeigneteren Lieder finden als die Psalme Davids, die der Heilige Geist eingegeben und gemacht hat." Daraus zog er allerdings den Schluss, dass ausschließlich Psalme geeignet seien im Gottesdienst gesungen zu werden.

Johannes Calvin hatte, als Nachfolger Luthers in der Reformation, mit seiner strengen Bibel Auslegung großen Einfluss auf die Entfaltung der neuen Christenheit. Viel der heutigen Antichristlichen Bewegung ist mehr gegen Calvins Gospel, das "Institute der Christlichen Religion" gerichtet als gegen das Christentum selbst.

Interessant in dem Zusammenhang ist hier ein Vergleich der drei führenden Gestalten der Reformation, wie die Nachwelt sie sieht: Da ist einmal Martin Luther, der deutsche Glaubensschwärmer von Wittenberg, dann der heterodox Andersdenkende Schweizer Huldreich Zwingli von Zürich, und am ende Johannes Calvin, der orthodox rechtgläubige Franzose von Genf.

Der kürzeste Psalm ist Psalm 117 mit nur zwei Versen und der längste Psalm 119 mit 170. Zu den bekanntesten Psalmen gehört wohl der Psalm 23 „Der Herr ist mein Hirte“. Ein wundersamer Psalm, der schon viele Menschen in schwierigen Situationen getröstet hat:

Du Herr bist mein Hirt, darum kenne ich keine Not.

Du bringst mich auf saftige Weiden,

lässt mich ruhen am frischen Wasser und gibst mir neue Kraft.

Auf sicheren Wegen leitest du mich, dafür bürgst du mit deinem Nahmen.

Und geht es auch durchs dunkle Tal - ich habe keine Angst!

Du Herr bist bei mir;

du schüttest mich und führest mich, das macht mir Mut.

*Vor den Augen meiner Feinde deckst du mir deinen Tisch;
als Gast nimmst du mich bei dir auf und füllst mir den Becher randvoll.
Deine Güte und Liebe umgeben mich an allen kommenden Tagen;
in deinem Haus darf ich nun bleiben mein Leben lang.*

Lasst uns doch diesen Psalm jetzt singen, Nummer 113 im roten Gesangbuch. Ich weiß, er steht da

nur in Englisch; wenn das Ihnen ein Problem ist dann summen Sie halt nur mit; es ist so eine schöne Melodie. Wir singen die Verse 1 und 5.

Es ist schön wenn man so Glauben kann. Aber ob so oder anders, alle Menschen glauben - irgendwie. Glauben ist eine Gottes-Gabe die jedem Menschen gegeben ist und von der Jeder auf seine Art Gebrauch macht, oft ohne dass er es weiß. Glauben ist eine Notwendigkeit ohne die das Leben undenkbar wäre.

Es gibt kein Wissen, keine Gewissheit und keine Weisheit die nicht irgendwie oder irgendwo vom Glauben oder seiner Schwester, die Hoffnung, getragen wird. Sie sind es, die uns in einer unsteten und gefährvollen Welt die Zuversicht leihen zum täglichen Leben. Und doch (vielleicht eben deshalb) ist der Glaube, oder das Glauben, eine schwer zu beschreibende Eigenschaft. Nicht nur weil das Wort selbst mehrerlei Auslegungen hat, so wie glauben – im Gegensatz zu Wissen, glauben – als in es ist möglich, Glauben – wie in Bekenntnis, und Glauben – als Vertrauen, sondern weil unsere ganze Lebensphilosophie, einschließlich des Gemeinschaftssinns darauf aufgebaut ist. Wir glauben mit der Sicherheit langer Erfahrung dass die Sonne morgen wieder aufgehen wird und Mond und Sterne sich um uns drehen; fast ohne Bedenken wagen wir uns mit unserem Auto auf die Straße im festen Glauben, dass die anderen Autofahrer das Rechte tun werden; und wir glauben liebend gern der seligmachenden Verheißung in dem Psalm von vorher.

Ohne vertrauensvolles Glauben in die Würde des Mitmenschen käme keine Gemeinde zu Stande. Der Glaube, oder das Glauben, ist das Fundament auf dem unsere Weltphilosophie aufgebaut ist. – Mit Vorliebe beschäftige ich mich mit Physik und Astronomie. Mein Bruder Theodor in München schickte mir unlängst eine CD mit Vorträgen von der Münchener Universität über Kosmologie und einer davon war über die Suche nach den kleinsten theoretischen Bestandteilen des Universums, die Erreger der Schwerkraft, der Gravität. Seit 400 Jahren kennen wir ihre Gesetze. Seit 100 Jahren wissen wir von ihrer Verwandtschaft mit Raum und Zeit und können diese Wirkungen berechnen. Jedoch der Ursprung, die Quelle, die Wiege der Gravitation, die Universalkraft die sowohl den Apfel vom Baum fallen lässt als den Mond in seiner Bahn um die Erde führt, ist immer noch in Vermutungen verschleiert und vom Glauben, dass wir es einmal wissen werden, getragen.

Vor etwa 30 Jahren hat ein junger Engländer eine Theorie aufgestellt nach der bestimmte Grundeigenschaften des Schwerkraftträgers gemessen werden könnten. Zu der Zeit schien es unmöglich diese Messungen je zu machen, da die nötige Energie dazu die Grenzen des Wirklichen weit überstieg. Doch der Glaube,
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dass die natürliche Entwicklung und der menschliche Wissensdrang eines Tages einen Weg finden wird, bestand. Und heute wird in der Schweiz am Fuße der Alpen von der Europäischen Kommission ein 26km Durchmesser Gerät eröffnet, das speziell zu dem Zweck gebaut wurde dem Ursprung der Schwerkraft näher zu kommen.

Natürlich kostet das viel Geld, und zwar so viel Geld dass es den Amerikanern, die etwa zur gleichen Zeit solch einen Super Zyklotron zu bauen angingen, zu viel wurde und sie es aufgaben. Sie verloren den Glauben daran. Wer weiß, vielleicht wäre das Soziale Kapital dieses Projekts in Amerika der Menschheit von größerem Nutzen geworden als mit Geldesmacht die Kultur anderer Völker zu zerstören.

Es ist nicht leicht Mensch zu sein. Wir müssen mit dem Bewusstsein von Furcht und Sterblichkeit fertig werden. Aber das gerade ist es, das uns Menschen aus den Kreaturen dieser Erde hervorhebt, was uns die Möglichkeit der Macht und Würde (von der Psalm 8 spricht) gibt Mensch zu sein. Ich denke Gott hat uns in der Entwicklung des Lebens die Würde und den Verstand gegeben die eventuellen Folgen unseres Tun und Handelns voraus-zu-ahnen, und ich sehe es als eine Sünde diese Gabe nicht in dem Grad indem sie jedem gegeben ist, voll auszunutzen. Wir stehen in Ehrfurcht (wie Psalm acht so schön sagt) und bestaunen den Himmel, die Sonne, den Mond und Sterne auf ihren Bahnen. Wir schauen in das Dunkel der Nacht und spüren in ihr die Unendlichkeit des Kosmos; und wir fühlen dass unser Sein einen Sinn haben muss der in dieser Welt erfüllt sein will.

Als Mensch kann man nicht bloß einfach vor sich hin leben wie ein Kartoffelstock. Mensch sein verpflichtet. Man hat Verantwortung für sich, seine Mitmenschen und seine Umwelt. Der Glaube der allein selig macht hat für mich immer irgend eine Art der Ausrede in sich: Ich bin nicht schuldig, ich kann nichts dafür, es kommt doch wie es will, warum soll ich mir Sorgen machen, wenn ich nichts tue mach ich nichts falsch. – Religiöser Glaube wird oft gepredigt als effektiver Schutz gegen das Feuer der Furcht, und wird dann bald zum Schild im Kampf gegen Lebenswandel und eine ungewisse Zukunft. Aber Sicherheit und Gewissheit sind Schatten-Illusionen die im Licht der Evolution zerrinnen. Wenn künstlich erhalten, können sie leicht ausarten in Überhebung und Greuelthaten.

In meiner Suche nach Worten zum Thema Psalm 8 kam ich, wie schon vorher erwähnt, auf Johannes Calvin und seine Zeit in Genf. Calvin brachte seine strengen Glaubensgesetze und religiöse Sicherheit von Frankreich mit sich, und in den ersten fünf Jahren seiner Amtszeit in Genf starben unter seiner Anweisung 54 Personen auf dem Scheiterhaufen. Das kann keine gesunde Religion sein. Eine gesunde Religion muss sich in ihrer Fassung und ihrem Streben den praktischen Umwelt Verhältnissen anpassen können; muss suchen dürfen, wachsen, offen und fröhlich sein, und in diesem Glauben die weltliche Entwicklung steuern.

Nun, "Brüder singt ein Lied der Freude..." Nummer 17 im roten Buch, die Verse 1, 2 & 3.

Ich will mit dem Psalm 8 diesen Saal schließen. Wie es bei Liedern die den Schöpfer lobpreisen oft der Fall ist, beginnt und endet Psalm 8 mit einem feierlichen Antiphon an den Herrn, dessen Herrlichkeit sich über das Universum ausbreitet. Papst Paul VI gab 1969 dieses Lied, das die Wunder der Natur und die Würde des Menschen in Gottes Namen preist, den ersten Mondfahrern mit auf ihre Reise zum Mond mit den Worten: "Der Mensch erscheint uns hier im Mittelpunkt dieses Unternehmens als Gigant. Er offenbart sich uns als göttlich, nicht von sich aus, aber in seinem Ursprung und seiner Bestimmung. **Dem Menschen, seiner Würde, seinem Geist und seinem Leben gebührt Ehre**". Und dieser irdische Gruß an eine neue Welt im All lautet so:

Herr unser Herrscher! Groß ist dein Ruhm auf der ganzen Erde!

Der Glanz deiner Hoheit überstrahlt den Himmel.

Deine Macht ist unermesslich;

*aus dem Lob deines geschlagenen Volkes baust du eine Mauer
an der deine Widersacher und Feinde zu Fall kommen.*

*Ich bestaune den Himmel den du gemacht hast, Mond und Sterne auf ihren
Bahnen:*

Wie klein ist da der Mensch! Und doch gibst du dich mit ihm ab.

*Ja, du hast ihm Macht und Würde verliehen; es fehlt nicht viel und er wäre
wie du.*

*Du hast ihn zum Herrscher gemacht über deine Geschöpfe, alles hast du
ihm unterstellt:*

*Die Schafe, Ziegen und Rinder, das Wild und die Vögel, die Fische und Unge-
heuer im Meer.*

Herr, unser Herrscher! Groß ist dein Ruhm auf der ganzen Erde.

Musik

Vielen Dank, Ingrid, für die Musik. Mein Dank der unsichtbaren Hand die den Raum mit Blumen geschmückt hat, und ein liebes Dankeschön euch allen die ihr diese besinnliche Stunde mit mir geteilt habt.

Ich wünsch euch noch einen schönen Sonntag.

SERVICE IN BENTLEIGH, 2:30PM SUNDAY 30 OCTOBER 2005

Music, Elisabeth Wagner

Hymn: No 39 "Harre meine Seele..." both verses

Hymn: No 42 "Herr dir ist niemand zu vergleichen..." also both verses.

When I send out the latest TSA on-line message about the partial Lunar Eclipse on 17 October it occurred to me how the interplay of light and shadow accompanies us throughout our life and provides the contrasts that balances our needs. The beauty of the night sky lies in the contrast between silvery-soft light of the Moon, the silken blackness of infinity and the brilliance of the twinkling stars. You do not see this during daytime, because when the transparent air above us is hit by the fiery light from the sun the air changes into a blue curtain that hides the stars from our sight. The Moon can sometimes be seen during the daytime, but its hardly worth a second look then. Light needs darkness to be appreciated. Even the warm glow of a candle loses its mystique in the brightness of day..

The shadow of the Earth touching the full Moon reminded me how important darkness can be in our lives, how most things only become visible or recognisable in the proper balance of light and shadow; how much information is there for the taking in the shading. The shadow of the Earth on the Moon proves that Sun, Earth and Moon are all in line and that the Sun, even when we do not see it anymore above us, is still shining brightly, for we can see the long shadow it casts into the cosmic depth.

I would like to talk today about our need for light and shadow, not only in physical events as in astronomy, but also in our daily life, where its symbolic equivalents, joy and sorrow, are also an essential necessity to social harmony. It is in this balance of light and shadow that I see the message of the story of Hiob, our text for today.

To begin let us sing hymn number 39, Harre, meine Seele ... both verses.

This is a lovely old hymn; in style and in sentiment it matches the text for today, which comes from the last chapter, nearly at the end of the Book of Job in the Old Testament: Job shows humility and his prayer is answered, chapter 42 verses 1 to 6.

1 Then Job answered the LORD:

2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? 'Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.'

5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Let me sketch out the background to this passage a bit to put the text in perspective. The book of Job is an wonderful and yet chilling account of one man's

struggle to discover a meaning for God.

After being forced to suffer everything imaginable Job argues with God that he does not, and did not, deserve to be treated the way God has treated him. God's persuasive counter argument is that Job does not have sufficient knowledge to know what is right or wrong from God's point of view. Then Job shows humility with the answer above.

The Book of Job is one long poem. It symbolically discusses the age-old paradox why good and innocent people also have to suffer. The enigma of the suffering of the righteous and the good fortune of the wicked was been often addressed by Israelite literature, both in the psalms and in other wisdom texts. Although not prominent in the book of Proverbs, it emerges more strongly in the later wisdom books of Ecclesiastes and Sirach. Several Psalms also address aspects of these issues (Ps 37; 39; 49; 73), but they do not exhibit the radical protest and questioning that one finds in the book of Job.

Senseless suffering can be one of the hardest problem to understand. It is a puzzle in our traditional world philosophy of cause and effect. The first reaction when a calamity befalls us is usually, what have I done wrong to deserve this! Job had an awful problem. Is not pain and suffering a punishment for some transgression? Reserved for transgressors? But Job was a good man. (He is in fact the only person in the Old Testament whose goodness is never in doubt). Yet he lost all his possessions. Job's children died. Job became so ill that he wanted to die.

His three friends argue that Job's misfortunes were proof that he had committed some sins for which he was being punished. His friends also advanced the converse position that good fortune is always a divine reward, and that if Job would renounce his supposed sins, he would immediately experience the return of good fortune. In response, Job asserted that he was a righteous man, and that his misfortune was therefore not a punishment for anything. This raised the possibility that God acts in capricious ways, and Job's wife urged him to curse God, and die. Instead, Job responded with equanimity: "The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The climax of the book occurs when God responds to Job, not with an explanation for Job's suffering but rather with a question: Where were you when I created the world? This response may be read in a variety of ways. Some see it as an attempt to humble Job. Yet the fact that Job, in his reply to the Lord quoted above, seems so comforted by God's appearance, and the fact that he 'saw God and lived', suggest that the author of the book was more concerned with whether or not God is present in people's lives, than with the question of whether or not God is just.

We, with the advantage of having seen the prologue in heaven where the plot to put Job to the test was hatched (to which Job was of course not part), we see (I see) a form of God imbued with human emotions, a God who has a need to be loved, who can be challenged at any moment to proof the faith of his subjects with elaborate schemes of punishment. The appended conclusion to the book (some say it is not part of the original story) has God restoring Job to wealth, granting him new children, and possibly restoring his health, although this is not implied or

explicitly stated, and suggests that the faith of the righteous is indeed rewarded. But there is something that we must understand; while the Book of Job does not give easy, clear answers to this eternal question it shows the problem in a symbolic way as it really is. It gives an honest record of the sufferer's doubts; it shows that suffering is not necessarily a punishment for sin (although Job has on occasion been accused by critics of complacency and materialism); it suggests what our attitude to trouble and pain should be. It is an attempt to confuse the question, "Is misfortune always a divine punishment for something someone has done?"

There is a deeper challenge for us today hidden in the story of Job. With our unique human ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, so to speak, we tend to assess and compare other people with ourselves. Not only that, we endow the creatures on this Earth, yes, even God in heaven, with our emotions, with our capacity to feel joy and sadness, compassion for pain and suffering, and to rejoice in the triumph of good over evil. We tend to forget that all of these emotions are part of the environment we ourselves live in. They are not universal; they are tools we humans became equipped with by evolution, as are the eyes in our head and muscles of our body. They are not God-given for our enjoyment as and when we please. Just as working, walking, running, swimming or speaking need constant practice to become good at, the extra-sensory feelings and emotions within us need practice too. Without balanced exercises they will dry out, shrivel up and become useless.

We have a "need" for emotional pain and sorrow to challenge apathy and bring out the will to overcome adversity. Call it part of our survival instinct; an instinct that tries to match our human nature to the nature of the environment so we can be supported by it. Just as a balance of light and shade are needed for life to flourish, so a measure of joy and sorrow is essential for our mind to develop greater understanding. I remember an old German proverb here, warning against overindulgence of any sort: "*Nichts is schlechter zu ertragen als eine Reihe von guten Tagen*", which roughly translated says "nothing is worse for you than too many good days".

Did Job learn from his experience? As I said before, the Book of Job is a poem; not a poem in the modern sense of rhyme and poetic metre, but in a lyrical way, like the Song of Solomon for instance. With a mixture of prose and verse it is counted as one of the five creative books in the Old Testament, and by some is seen as the most difficult book of the Bible to fathom. The many Exegesis of the book (exegesis are studies to find the author's intended meaning of a story) are classic attempts to reconcile the co-existence of evil and God. Job appears both as an invocation to righteousness, a cynical outlook on the idea of righteousness, and a response to the problem of evil. Scholars are divided as to what the original intent of the poem was, and a few even suggest it was meant as a satire against puritanical religion.

I see in the book, beyond its lyrical beauty, an old religion, a philosophy with a picture of a man-oriented image of God from a bygone era. An era that did not, that does not recognise the responsibility each of us has for our neighbour, for humanity and for our environment. An era where sheep, goats, camels and cows

were the measure of a man's standing in the eyes of God. It is a story that tells us much about the priorities of life and beliefs in human society as it was some three thousand years ago. A time when Plato had Socrates asking the ethical dilemma question: "Is what God commands right because He commands it, or is it right for some reason other than that it is His command?" In other words, is something right prior to God's commanding it (or wrong prior to His forbidding it) or is it neither right nor wrong unless and until God has pronounced it one or the other? Is it simply His pronouncing it right or wrong that makes it so, or (seeing that we can feel upset by God's unfair treatment of Job) are there right and wrongs even for the gods? Is there light and darkness even in heaven?

In the beginning, when the world was without void or form, darkness reigned supreme. Then the light came, whether by God's command "Let there be light" as the Bible says or with a "Big Bang" as the scientists say, it does not matter, an overabundance of hot light was suddenly there and, as we know, this is just as deadly to life as is frigid darkness. Life, as we know it, needs a proper balance of both, so God divided the world into light and darkness and the first day was created. Evolution took a little bit longer to give form and void to the Earth, but the common theme for us is that without a temperature gradient from hot to cold, from light to darkness, life would not have evolved on Earth. The Book of Job is a story, not the measure of our lives. We live in a universe that has billions of stars like the sun, and may have millions of planets like the Earth, some of which may contain life as we know it, other intelligent life with their own measure of light and darkness and right and wrong.

Within the last two years some 160 new planets have been discovered by astronomers in our galactic neighbourhood alone. Our world is changing before our eyes, the horizons widen with every day. The nineteenth century English poet John Keats once bemoaned that Isaac Newton had "destroyed the beauty and poetry of the rainbow by reducing the mystery to a mechanical prism". He lamented

*"will natural philosophy yet clip an Angel's wings
conquer all mysteries by Rule and Line?
Empty the haunted air, the gnomed mine
and unweave the colours in the rainbow?"*

Time and experience has shown that science and aesthetics complement each other in a better and wider understanding. The mysteries of our world (the things we know that we do not know) have grown exponentially with our greater vision over the horizons of yesteryear. We know that life needs a natural balance of light and darkness, of joy and sorrow. We know of atoms and of cells, we know the process of procreation; we know that our emotions of love, hate, trust, fear, ambitions and sympathy are controlled by hormones our body generates to meet given situations. We know how drugs and alcohol interfere with our bodily functions. Yet the feeling of mystery around us is, if anything, greater than ever. Our vision of God has grown and widened too. It no longer includes favourite people or nations, it is everywhere – within and without and nowhere at the same time. Its laws are the laws of life and Nature and they match the infinity of the universe.

Let us now sing the second hymn, number 42 “Herr dir ist niemand zu vergleichen...” both verses.

Would you light a candle in the sunshine, in a noisy or windy environment? No, to appreciate the light of a candle, the softness of its glow, the uplifting symbol of the flame pointing finger-like to heaven, the invigorating smell of the beeswax, it needs a subdued atmosphere, shadows in the corner, beautiful music and open and receptive minds. The beauty of a lit candle lies in the limited interaction with the wider environment; bounded by darkness and mystery it is (it can paradoxically only be) a symbol of goodness and friendship in a dark and scary world.

Charles Darwin has often been vigorously attacked for what he wrote and what he believed, it happens even today. However, the fact is that the typical attack on Darwin is light years away from the place where Darwin made his greatest impact on traditional understanding. Darwin forced us to acknowledge that Creation is an ongoing and unfinished process. Human life is evolving, there is no perfection, there never was; all life is in flux. That was the Darwinian insight. Our problem is that we do not yet know what to do with that understanding.

We are still struggling with the appropriate balance of light and shadow in our lives. But are we not fortunate to have been given the time and the ability in our lives to talk about these things? To consider these questions? Time to give meaning to a life between light and shadow, time for joy and sorrow in society, time for greater awareness of the nature around us and the desire to create a sustainable environment. We are indeed truly thankful for everything that makes life worth living.

*Wer nie sein Brot mit Tränen ass,
wer nie die kummervollen Nächte
auf seinem Bette weinend sass
der kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen Mächte.*

Thank you, Elisabeth, for the music, thank you to the unseen hands that arranged the flowers and thank all of you for sharing the time with me. I wish you a pleasant afternoon with coffee and cake compliments of the Bentleigh community.

2005 NEW YEAR'S EVE SAAL / SERVICE IN BAYSWATER

Music: Veronica Rudowicz

Hymns: 120 "Von guten Mächten..." just one verse.

71 "Mit Jubelklang stimmt an das Lied..." verses 1, 2 & 6.

When the shadows lengthen in the evening and the sun sets and darkness descends on us, when the sky opens the curtains to the cosmos and we see the stars sending their coded greetings, we may occasionally become aware of the passing of time. We human beings live consciously inside a medium called time. We experience everything in life as having a beginning and an ending. We count our age with annual birthdays, and our marriages with annual anniversaries. We evaluate history in units of time: days, years, decades and centuries. Because that is so it is inevitable that when we come to an end point of one of our measurements of time, like tonight, we pause to reflect and evaluate.

Not only do we live consciously inside that medium, we have an internal clock tuned to diurnal changes of light and darkness; a program adapted to our rhythm of working, eating and sleeping. It helps our mind and body to anticipate the environmental changes that surround us and prepare us for peak efficiency or for effective relaxation. All subconsciously. This biological clock aligns itself with the flow of time during the day, to the routines of the working week, to seasonal changes in the length of the day, temperature fluctuations during the year and the type of activity we do. We have all heard of occasions (even experienced it on our own body) where this clock came out of step with the time of day. On long aircraft flights we may become disoriented, can't sleep, and our body clock may take days or even weeks to catch up with the new environment. If you have ever had to work shift work you will know how hard it is to switch from day shift to night shift or vice versa. We are creatures of habits, conditioned by the daily environment.

We know this daily synchronising with the environment does extend to the seven day week. We all look forward to the weekend, a change of pace, a family environment for a day or so, and then on Monday start the new week with fresh enthusiasm and vigour.

What I am asking now is, could this biological time-keeping extend over the period of a year? Does our body-clock need an annual break? Has New Year and New Year's Eve more than a historical significance in our lives? I would like to come back to that in a moment.

Let us now sing hymn number 120, "Von guten Mächten..." The hymn has only one verse so, that we may fit the words to the melody properly, Veronica will first play the melody through once and you can hum along in English or German; the second time around we sing with all our heart.

Our text for today comes from the book of psalms and is very appropriate for today's reflection on the passage of time – Psalm 90, a prayer of Moses. I have selected from the verses 1 - 12.

"...O Lord, even before the mountains were brought forth and you formed the Earth and the world, you are God.

A thousand years in your sight are as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night...

They are like the grass that sprouts up in the morning and in the evening it is cut down....

The years of our lives are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they are fourscore, their pride is labour and sorrow for we are soon cut off and fly away.

Teach us, o Lord, to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom".

The lovely story of creation in the Book of Genesis has divided our lives into seven-day cycles from time immemorial. God set the scene, as He worked the first day between evening and morning, reflected on his work and pronounced it good. – Theologians still argue about whether God created the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; that is to say there was no matter, no space or time before. The Hebrew text leaves that open. The author's account though does resemble other ancient creation stories -- for example, the Babylonian and Greek. In both these pagan tales the orderly universe is wrested from primeval chaos of darkness and disorganized matter ("chaos" is in fact the Greek term). – God worked the second and the third day to finish the major construction work, and then on the fourth, fifth and sixth day he attended to fitting it out and bringing life into it. In today's computer language we would allocate three days to construct the hardware and three days to design the necessary software to run it.

That done God took a rest. Why would the author of the Book of Genesis have felt the need to give God a day of rest? – By the way have you ever wondered about the quaint sounding definition of a day in Genesis? It does not say from morning to evening, but very specifically it says, from evening to morning. This is worth a moment's reflection. Imagine you had none of the trimmings of modern civilisation, how would you tell the time of the day? By the rising sun of course, you say. But the sun rises (or sets) at different times during the year. At what time would you then say one day finished and the next day started?

There is one obvious moment in the daily cycle that never varies – when the sun is at its highest point in the sky it is 12 o'clock. And in the days the Bible was written that was the only reliable reference point, readily available to everyone. That's why they started each day at 12 noon, not at midnight as we do now, and it lasted from midday to midday. The time from noon to noon was then divided into a convenient number of hours, or buckets of water or whatever mechanical devices they used to measure the time periods for regulating their daily activities. God's day of rest would have been from noon on Saturday to noon on Sunday.

Let's go back a step. Why was it necessary to give God a day of rest? Or, turning it around the other way, why did God deem it proper to insert a rest-day at all, and why after six working days. Why not five, or seven or 10? It appears that at the time the book was written the need of people for a break in routine work

was already well known to the Hebrew. And why seven days? History shows that despite serious attempts to introduce a working "week" of different lengths none of the alternatives ever took on. The ancient Egyptians are known to have used a 10 day week, as did the French after the revolution in 1793.

The French also, in a fit of metrication madness, divided the day into ten hours consisting of 100 minutes of 100 seconds each. It was short lived; Napoleon abolished it again in 1806. The seven day week probably originated in Babylon or Persia and proved definitely the most popular and enduring system. It was already known in Rome long before Christianity came on the scene. Why seven? There are many theories for the magic of seven. For example, if you wrap a rubber band around seven circular objects you get a perfect hexagon with the 7th in the middle. It is the only stable configuration of wrapping more than 3 circular objects. Another viable theory correlates the seven day week to the seven (astrological) "planets" known to the ancients: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn, which seems to be confirmed by the similarity of their names.

But I feel there must be more to the seven day week than just religious or astrological motivation. It must have something to do with our human make-up. We are not machines. When organised labour became part of community life, introduction of an occasional chance for reflection became essential. Apart from a belief in a higher order of things we humans have a need to see an end to what we are doing, a break, an opportunity to talk to people, refocus our attention away from the mundane to something new, something different. Perhaps concentrating on the one chore for six days is the break-even point in our brain. After that you start to lose concentration, your mind wanders, you start making mistakes and have accidents. It is a psychological effect that some compare to a battery running down and needing recharging.

Do we also possess such a feeling for the annual cycle? Is there more to New Year's Eve and Happy New Year than eat and drink and make merry? Do we have a psychological need to put a line under the completed year, make a balance of debit and credit? add up our emotional Soll und Haben? Do we see it as an opportunity for a fresh start? Another New Year's Resolution, like: do more exercise, stick to the latest diet, go to Saal regularly, write more letters, say Hello to more people, wash the car each week, talk to the neighbours, invite our friends for dinner, or perhaps take that overdue overseas trip? –

On New Year's Eve it is open season on wishes. It is Christmas all over, even better, for the promises you give on New Year's Eve you get to keep yourself; the Credit Card on emotions has no limits. – Why shouldn't humans have an inbuilt annual clock? We know that plants have it, they know when to sprout, when to flower, when to let the fruit ripen and when to let their leaves fall. Animals have it, the birds and the bees have it. Why not us? Just because we have eaten from the tree of knowledge, must our consciousness override all our instincts? Today society can foretell the tides and count the seasons, we measure the years by the politicians, the decades by the wars waged, the centuries by technology, the millennia by the dominating religion and the ages by the material used for the construction of tools. Excitement builds as we count down the seconds towards

midnight: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one –

Happy New Year! We have done it! Actually to be correct this year you will have to count ...three, two, one, one – Happy new Year! For science, in its never-ending quest for greater and greater accuracy will this year again add a leap second on New Years Eve at midnight. Our Earth is slowing down and our days are getting longer. Since 1967, when it was decided to tie the length of the standard second to atomic time rather than to the solar day, 25 such leap seconds have had to be added.

Numbering our days, fixing the exact end of one year and the start of a new year has always been important to man for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was religion and the timing of Easter. Early civilisations used the heliacal (meaning near the sun) first rising of a bright star after its conjunction with the sun. The Sothic year of the Egyptians is determined by the rising of Sothis (the Egyptian name for the Dog Star, Sirius), which also heralds the flooding of the Nile. Massive and elaborate monuments, circles of stone like Stonehenge, are believed to have been dedicated to such quests. The Romans first used the Vernal Equinox, the time when the sun's path through the sky starts to cross the Equator. Vernal means 'in Spring' and Equinox equal night. Remember the soothsayer's warning to Julius Caesar? 'beware the Ides of March'? That used to be the start of their year. The early Roman calendar had only ten months and started the year in March, which is still reflected in the names of some months derived from Roman numerals: September (Seventh), October (Eighth), November (Ninth), December (Tenth). Around 115 BC the months of January and February were added to the end of the year. But because consuls were chosen in January, and because years were named after the consuls who served in that year, January became the de facto beginning of the year, until in 45 BC Julius Caesar introduced the Julian calendar, officially decreeing that the New Year should start on 1 January.

When we thus reflect on the nature of our guidelines, we recognise how much the apparent order of modern civilisation depends on how we structure science and technology, and how much our decisions for the coming year are based on our trust in the value of the system. We realise that our wishes for the customary health and happiness and peace on Earth will always be a compromise with reality. Jesus is quoted as having said: "In this world you will have tribulation." The peace he promised was, in his words, "not as the world gives." When in the Fourth Gospel he is asked whether either the blind man or his parents were guilty of causing his blindness, he said that this is not how the world operates. It is our belief and our capacity for hope that gives us the courage to live in this evolving and transitory world without despair. Our job is to make this world into a more user-friendly place where ever we can, and to accept as reality that which what we cannot change.

A sad reminder of the "three-score and ten" transitory nature of our existence on this Earth is the list of 12 Members and Friends who passed away during the year 2005. Would those of you who can, please stand in honour of their memory while I read out their names:

- Luise Imberger
- Agnes Stütz
- Theodor Doh
- Luise Wied
- Paul Rubitschung
- Nella Weller
- Annemarie Kirchner
- Else Hermann
- Manfred Unger
- Hildegard Turnevicius
- Agnes Lämmle
- Elly Steller.

Having passed our way on their journey through God's enigmatic kingdom here on Earth they, in their passing, have left this world a better place. We extend our sincere condolences to the families. –

Please be seated

On a happier note we take pleasure in announcing 12 Babies born to Members and Friends during the year:

- Jaqui Evelyn Katz
- Mia Johanna Christine Hoefler
- Tate Rodi Schwarzbauer
- Riley James Löbert
- Liam Alexander Arndt
- Natalie Loren Scheerle
- Aida Ellen Arndt McCoid
- Owen Hugh Spieth
- Rachel Susanne Glover
- Benjamin Kurt Spieth
- Ellena Lauren Glenk
- Benjamin Nikolai Arndt.

We congratulate the happy couples and wish the babies and their parents (and their grandparents) health and happiness in all the years to come.

Health and happiness to you all, as we now look forward to the new year with anticipation. Tonight we turn over the page in our book of life on 2005 and let the blank pages of 2006 tempt us to write of our hopes and aspirations for the next 12 months. Tomorrow the curtain will rise on a brand new day, of a brand new year and a brand new adventure. "The darkness cedes, the night retreats, the glorious sun has risen..."

Let us greet the new year, the start of summer and the new generation as we sing together the song of joy and the glory of God, hymn number 71: "mit Jubelklang stimmt an das Lied..." , verses 1, 2 & 6.

called "The Four Candles". In closing let me just tell you about it. In the story you have a dream that there are four candles within you. When they are all alight they make your eyes shine, your face radiant and you are a nice person. Each candle is sustained by one of your emotions.

- The first candle is called Peace. One day you felt angry about all the strife in the world and the candle became sad and went out.
- The second candle is called Trust. It went out when a friend disappointed you.
- The third candle is called Love, but it could not find reciprocate love and went out.
- There was only one candle left. You had lost your energy, your confidence and your vitality. Then a young child came along. It saw the cold candles and asked them, why are you three candles out. Each of them told their sad story. Then the child asked the last candle 'what is your name?' Hope, the candle said. 'You look wonderful', said the young child. 'I'll just take your light and with it light up all the others'. No sooner said than done, with the candle Hope it lit up Peace, Trust and Love.
- The four of them filled you with a warm glow that made your eyes shine again and your face radiant.

The moral of the story? *Es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt, doch hoffet er, solang er lebt.* As long as you have hope all the other emotions can be rekindled. Any child knows that.

If I appear to mix science, religion and philosophy in my Saals at random, it is with a genuine belief that this is the way modern society becomes aware of the benefits that can arise from participating in religious groups. While we humans have an in-built need to believe, that belief is effective only if you are able to share it with others. It has to be believable.

The Templar religious philosophy, to be seen by others as an attractive way of life, needs to prove itself laterally, beyond our community. This it can only do through sciences. Religion to me is a science, a science which can no longer be seen as detached from everyday life and evolution. It is part of the wider field of philosophy, the love of wisdom. Teach us, O Lord, to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

== Music ==

Thank you, Veronica, for the music, thanks to the unseen hands that arranged the friendly flowers and thank you all for making this evening here in this Templar temple a pleasure. I wish you a happy and safe New Year holiday.

May 2006 be a prosperous year for you and your families; a peaceful year full of trusting friends and loving happiness and, most of all, a healthy dose of hope.

SOMMERFEST 2006 SERVICE IN BAYSWATER, 5 MARCH

Music: Ingrid Lämmle-Ruff

Text of the Day : John 10: 31-39, 'Jesus is accused of blasphemy'

Hymns: 31 "Geh aus mein Herz und suche Freud..." verses 1, 2, 3 & 4.

47 "Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund..." all eight verses.

Prelude

Welcome to the 2006 Templer Sommerfest. A special welcome to people who have come from afar, visitors from the country, from Interstate and from overseas. And an extra special welcome to anyone here for the first time. Is any one here for the first time? We Templers are a friendly group, but not very outgoing (as you may already have noticed) and stuck with old-fashioned Swabian hospitality, which means you are automatically considered to be part of the family, and family members, of course, look after themselves. Don't they? So, just think of this as an extension of your home and you will do alright.

To begin let us sing together the hymn that over the years has become synonymous with our Sommerfest, symbolic of our attitude to life and our philosophy: 'Geh aus mein Herz und suche Freud...', number 31 in the red hymnbook, verses 1, 2, 3, & 4.

*I, too, cannot and will not rest;
God's work with which the Earth is blest,
arouse my admiration.
I join the songs His creatures sing,
and let my thanks and praises ring
with heartfelt jubilation.*

What a beautiful picture the hymn paints; a positive attitude and an acclamation of the wonders of nature and the joy of being alive. This beautiful poem of thanksgiving for the divine delights of summer, and of anticipation of the joys of Paradise, appeared in 1656. Gerhardt in this inspiring poem showed himself (like Luther 100 years earlier) a real lover of God's creation. He loved nature and admired its beauty.

Paul Gerhardt, the "sweet singer of Lutheranism" was born on March 12, 1607 in Gräfenhaim, near Wittenberg, Germany and lived during the religious wars of the 17th century. Trained to be a Lutheran pastor, he matriculated as a student at the University of Wittenberg, where Martin Luther had taught a century before, on January 2, in 1628. The whole of his youth and early manhood fell in the time of war.

It must have been a period full of disappointment for him, when we find a man of his powers at the age of forty-five still only a private tutor and candidate for holy orders. However, in 1651, Gerhardt was appointed pastor at Mittenwald, near Berlin. Several of his hymns were published in 1653 in the Berlin Hymn Book, and in collections in Brandenburg and Saxony. They immediately became

popular with people, and religion in the Germany of the seventeenth century found its purest and sweetest expression in those hymns of Paul Gerhardt. His poems were intended to be set to music and sung in church, or learnt by heart by the children at home, and as such constantly reveal the homeliness and simplicity, the deeply devout and quietly courageous spirit of the Lutheran pastor.

He is described to us as a man of middle height, of quiet but firm and cheerful bearing; while his preaching is said to have been very earnest and persuasive. Not only was his preaching full of Christian love and charity, he practised it as well by never turning a beggar from his door. His religion and his temperament alike made him cheerful, and none of the many disappointments in his life seem ever to have embittered his mood

As a poet he holds the highest place among the hymn-writers of Germany. His hymns seem to be the spontaneous outpouring of a heart that overflows with love, trust, and praise. At times it rises to a beauty and grace that give the impression of being unstudied, yet could hardly have been improved by art. His tenderness and fervour are genuine; his language is simple and pure. If sometimes it has a touch of homeliness, it never degenerates into vulgarity.

He is buried at the Paul-Gerhardt-Kirche, Lübben an der Spree, Germany.

The Templer Choir, with Annette Wagner-Hesse directing, will now give its own rendition of the Gerhardt hymn we sang before, "Geh aus mein Herz und suche Freud..."

When you go outside a little later to enjoy the Templer Sommerfest, let your heart take in the wonders of God's creation, try to carry the words and the melody with you and see the beauty of nature with the open eyes of Paul Gerhardt.

Even I, who all my life strived to bring scientific awareness into the Templer religious philosophy, even I am on occasions like this touched by an involuntary longing for the simple, uncomplicated life, promised by old-fashioned Christianity and the Bible; 'Ich singe mit wenn alles singt, und lasse was dem Höchsten klingt aus meinem Herzen rinnen'. Surely, the kingdom of God is made up of feelings like that. – I then have to consciously remind myself that this song was written, not in an idyllic pastoral Christian paradise, but during the thirty year war; a war waged in the name of religion and triggered by different interpretations of Christian religion; a time of unimaginable cruelty by Christian against Christian and inconceivable suffering. Gerhardt himself had a life-long struggle to mediate between the Lutherans and the Calvinists.

And somewhat reluctantly I come back to reality. There must be more to achieving the elusive peace on Earth than wishful singing and preaching love of God and neighbour for another 2000 years. It needs a wider understanding. Religion without philosophy, without the love of wisdom, without an awareness of the world around us, can be like looking through a telescope; it lets you see selected parts of the sky in detail, but you lose perspective and a sense for the overall picture. We must remember that anything done locally will have wider repercus-

sion. By focussing too much on religious love as a solution to your local problems you may at the same time create an us-and-them attitude in the wider world. Like the warm light of a candle, which is best seen in a dark room, love is most effective in a hostile environment, and in fostering a need for love you may unwittingly open a door to fear, suspicion and envy. For me the solution lies not in setting my mind on the perfection of a biblical kingdom of God, but in a better understanding of evolution and the wider meaning of life. What would be the measure of such a meaning?

The Universe has no meaning. It can not have any meaning. Why not? Simply because to have a meaning implies that what happens within - and to - the Universe is important to something beyond the realm of our Universe. But if the Universe is all there is (as the name suggests), what would be the measure of that meaning? The cosmos, with its billions of galaxies as far as the eye can see, each with its own 100 billions of stars and probably billions of inhabited planets like the Earth, makes no sense, has no meaning – beyond that which it gives to itself. And the means to give itself a meaning, nature found in what is called evolution.

Evolution brings into effect competition, the means for survival of the fittest and intelligence. Everything within this world is evolving, growing, adapting and changing. Everything! From Galaxies to stars to planets and to their living inhabitants and their understanding of Religion. With evolution everything that happens anywhere at any time is in some way affecting the future. It means that what I am doing here today is in some way shaping the world of tomorrow. That gives a meaning to me and what I do. To have a meaning, to be meaningful, you must play the game of evolution and do something that means something to someone else. You have to interact. *Auf gut Schwäbisch 'du kannscht net blos vor di nabele wie en Kartoffelstock'*. Coming to think of it, even a potato plant in its symbiotic lifestyle produces potatoes for consumption by others.

What about a community? Can a community of people get to the stage where it has no meaning to the outside world? What if a community becomes self-centred, inward looking in the belief that it has the perfect vision? What if that community measures its performance only by legal compliance, financial viability and the satisfaction of its members? does not count the number of followers it attracts or cultivate interaction with the wider community? Can that community still have a meaning to the wider society? Will it still have an input into the evolution of humanity? Or will it be seen as irrelevant in the evolutionary struggle for meaningful survival?

The other day I read an article by Bishop Spong about the United Church of Canada. Officials of this Church have purchased a piece of land in a suburb of Toronto in order to start an experimental congregation. This entity will deliberately and self-consciously seek to develop a new model of what it means to be the church in the 21st century. It will be dedicated to theological openness, discussion and debate. It will seek to create worship forms and practices that do not force worshippers to say liturgical words that are meaningless or unbelievable. A goal for this new community will be a distinction between the experience of God and the explanation of that experience. The Bible, the Creeds and all church dogma

and doctrine are in the last analysis only explanations, and every explanation of an experience is time-bound, time-warped and destined to be superseded. No Bible text can ever be inerrant, no pope ever be infallible and no creed eternally true. Today we can no longer believe in a God who, if we pray fervently enough, will break into the ordered world of natural cause and effect and accomplish a miracle for a divine purpose. This, Dr Spong goes on, will be a Church dedicated to listening to the questions of people rather than to pretending to know all the answers. It will be open to racial diversity and to differing expressions of religious truth. There will be no claim that there is only one way to journey into the mystery and wonder of God. The church will not require its members to remain childlike, but assist its people in the hard task of growing up into emotional maturity. It will seek to attract all those for whom the God of the traditional church is simply too small.

Will this community have a meaning to the population outside of itself? Will it attract new members and grow? Can it be the mustard seed from which a mighty tree grows? Will it have followers who will form more such communities to spread all over the world? Even without a Jerusalem?

Our text for today comes from the gospel of St John and highlights the danger any dogmatic belief can create if it not allowed to evolve, be it in God, scripture, truth or meaning. The book of John is one of the five Johannian books in the Bible. It is easily distinguished from the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, which focus more of Jesus' life. John in this work is concerned far more with the mystical relation of the Son to the Father. He essentially develops the concept of the Trinity. After the prologue (1:1-5), the narrative of this gospel begins with verse 6, and consists of two parts:

The first part (to chapter 12), called "the Book of Signs", contains the story of Jesus' public ministry from the time of his baptism by John the Baptist to its close.

The second part (chapter 13-20), called "the Book of Glory", shows Jesus in his private life, his dialogues with his immediate followers, his sufferings and crucifixion and his appearances to the disciples after his resurrection.

Chapter 21, the "appendix", recounts the death of the "beloved disciple".

So to our text, excerpts from chapter 10: 31 -39. Following Jesus' blunt statement to the crowd 'My father and I are one' the Jews take up stones to stone him. At this Jesus said to them, 'I have set before you many good deeds, for which of those would you stone me?' The Jews replied, 'we will not stone you for any good deed, but for blasphemy. You claim to be a god'. Jesus then replied, 'is it not written in the scriptures that those to whom the word of God is delivered are called gods?. If I am not acting as my Father would, do not believe me. But if I am, then accept the evidence of my deeds, even if you do not believe me, so that you may recognise and know that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.'

This is a most amazing scene. They are standing there with stones at the ready to kill him, and he calmly tries to help them see their error. He appeals to them on the basis of their own experience and the Scriptures. His obscure

reference to Psalm 82 in 'those that receive the word of God...' though, is just as much a condemnation of the judges for not exercising their responsibility faithfully. This is the central truth of his identity, emphasized throughout this Gospel. What he means by the title Son of God is not a denial of the truths of Scripture, but goes beyond anything the people had thought before. He is appealing to them to accept the evidence of their senses beyond the dogmatic belief, but to no avail. Again they try to seize him, but he escapes their grasp once more.

Interpreting the scriptures has been a favourite pastime of preachers for centuries; ever since the Bible became public property. And it will continue to do so. I see it not so much as a search for the truth but an attempt to match its meaning to our lives and times, a meaning which fits our currently prevailing philosophy and one each of us can believe. That was no different 400 years ago in Paul Gerhardt's time. All interpretations are time bound and conditioned by the environment that created them. It has been said you will only experience the warm glow of Christianity if you are prepared to abandon the myths of the past and create one that befits your own level of understanding.

Let us now sing another of Paul Gerhardt's simple and touching hymns, number 47 'Ich singe dir mit Herz und Mund...' all eight verses.

As you now go out to enjoy the day's activities, do share your thoughts with other people. Talk to them, especially if they are new to our environment. Remember you are a Templer, which means 'to see every person as a temple in which God's spirit dwells'. This means every person, the stranger, the volunteer, the players and the ball-boys, they are all your neighbours. So, love your neighbour as yourself, for getting to know another human being is the most direct and rewarding God experience you can ever have.

Music

Thank you, Ingrid, for the music, thanks to the unseen hands that arranged the friendly flowers and thank you all for sharing this time with me. I wish you a happy and safe "Sommerfest."

9 JULY SAAL 2006 IN THE BAYSWATER CHAPEL

Music Veronica Rutowicz

Text Mark 9: 2-8. The Transfiguration of Jesus.

Hymns: No 126 "Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte..." verses 1, 2 & 5.

No 64 "Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König..." verses 1, 2, 3, & 4

Musical Prelude

Let me start today with a question. Do you believe? A simple enough question, isn't it. But do you? Or you, or you believe? You will immediately come back to me of course, and say, what do you mean by that. Do you mean believe as in religion? Belief in the Bible, in Jesus, in God, in the Trinity? In Father Christmas or in the astrological signs of the stars? Do you mean, do I belief in what I read in the Newspaper, what is written in black and white, what the neighbour tells me, I hear on Radio, or see on TV? Do you mean the confidence to believe in oneself, or belief as in not knowing, or will it rain tomorrow?

– You see, I can make this list is as long as our total human experiences allow. Everyone believes; everyone believes something, in something or in many things; it is part of human nature. When I was a child I believed (amongst other things) that somewhere up there, way above the clouds there was a heaven. And when you die you walked a narrow, steep path up to it and knocked on the heavenly gate. St Peter, looking a bit like father Christmas, would unlock the door with a heavy, old-fashioned key that took two hands to turn in the lock. Opening the door just a little bit he would look at you, ask your name and then open his book of life to see if you had a reservation. If your name was registered, St Peter would smile a welcome at you, open wide the pearly gate and let you in. At the same time a multitude of angels, cherubim and seraphim would escape, come running out through the door, laughing and singing holy, holy, holy as they tumble down onto the soft clouds. – I still treasure the thought. –

I wonder if the story is still being told in Sunday School? Perhaps today Petrus would, instead of the rusty old key on a heavy chain, carry an encrypted key-card and swipe a digital lock to activate an automatic sliding door?

Hymn no 126 would go well with that picture. Let us sing "Wie groß ist des Allmächt'gen Güte..." verses 1, 2 & 5

Welcome to you all. A special welcome to anyone here for the first time. Is someone here for the first time? If you are not yet used to the way Templer Services are presented, let me make a couple of comments: Not only do we here remain seated while singing, as demonstrated just now, our Elders also have the freedom to express their individual beliefs, their interpretation of the scriptures without dogmatic restrictions, or having to resort to dated philosophies and rituals. So, if I do not quote the Bible exactly as you think it should be and do not offer a traditional prayer during this Service it is not because I lack respect for, or belief

in, a higher authority, but because for me my feelings, and the thoughts I use to express them here, are a genuine search for greater awareness. Being here in this inspiring and uplifting environment, soaring like the tall trees in a park, wide open as a grassy plain, with music that makes it a concert hall, all of what I am saying comes from the heart, is my belief, and for me – is my prayer.

I think the ability to belief is a necessary function of all living things; it is, after all, the basis of all knowledge. It enables us to feel at home in our universe without really understanding it. The human ability to give labels and names to things and feelings is a tool the mind uses to orient itself in, and to widen its understanding of a basically hostile environment. An environment we try to make sense of, but clearly do not have the capacity to understand fully. Real or imaginary, it applies to physical features as well as our conscious belief. We need something to tell East from West, North from South, and right from wrong. We need names for the features around us to memorise a path, just as we need names for feelings to communicate with each other.

It is a way to become familiar with ourselves and our function in the world around us. Sometimes we invent personal names or give attributes to an object, fully aware that it isn't really true; the sun smiles, the brook talks, the wind whispers, darkness broods, the voice of thunder threatens. We use animation to fill our environment with responsive feelings and then listen to their echoes.— Recent research has shown that what we call belief sits in a special section of the brain, a section quite removed from our ability to reason, a section that is in fact dominated by feelings and emotions. You may have noticed yourself how hard it is to reason with someone about their belief. We use belief to increase our capacity for greater awareness, to theorise, to hypothesise. We know that what we do know through science is just a vanishingly small section of what there is to know. The rest is guesswork, belief or make-belief. Our human knowledge is, like the narrow band of light we see within the immense spectrum of electromagnetic radiation, embedded in an ocean of beliefs that extends at either end out to infinity.

Why am I detailing all this? Because it puts today's text in some form of perspective. It gives me an opportunity to talk about the text in my own way, without appearing to impose on your personal belief.

The Text for the day concerns the transfiguration of Jesus, a difficult thing to visualise without resorting to the supernatural or explaining it as a parable. It comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 9, verses 2 to 8, but the story is also told, almost verbatim, in Matthew 17 and in Lucas 9. The text follows immediately Jesus' telling the crowd that they would see the kingdom of God come to power within their lifetime.

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain, alone, and there, in their presence he was transfigured; his clothes became dazzling white like no bleacher on Earth could equal. Elijah and Moses appeared and started to talk with Jesus. Then Peter spoke. 'Rabbi' he said 'how good that we are here! Shall we make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah?' He was terrified and did not know what else to say. Then suddenly a cloud

cast a shadow over them, and out of the cloud came a voice: 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him'. But when they looked around there was nobody to be seen but Jesus, alone with themselves.

Traditionally, the event was considered to have happened literally, and it was believed that the event took place on Mount Tabor, a 575m high, dome-shaped hill, rising out of the Jezreel plains, some 17 km west of the Sea of Galilee. Some modern scholars however believe, as did the ancient gnostics, that the Synoptic Gospels were originally meant to be understood allegorically, that is, symbolic only. You see, in Hebrew literature Moses and Elijah have been interpreted to represent the Law and the Prophets respectively, and their recognition in conversation with Jesus are symbolising how Jesus fulfils both "the law and the prophecies".

This is without doubt a very important point in the story of Jesus. A point, some would say, where the die of the fate of Jesus is cast; he realises what it is he has to do. But what else is the story (or the author of the story) trying to tell us? Is it a legend, or a piece of theological symbolism, a parable? If it is in some sense a historical narrative, what was it that actually happened? What can we say is the theological significance of what is recorded? – Peter's own statement in 2 Pet 1:16-18 is that it was more than a vision; he treats it as a genuine factual, sensory experience: "...we saw it with our own eyes ...we were with him on the sacred mountain and heard the voice from heaven...". That's where the belief I spoke of before comes in. It is not a question of, was it true? Or not true? But simply, how would you like to believe it. –

150 years of Templer history can teach us a lot about religious evolution and changing beliefs. What was once a deeply motivating belief for our forefathers, the messianic future of Jerusalem, is today reserved, with the story of Petrus and his key to heaven, for the Sunday School children. So, let's look at the text again:

The only words spoken in the scene on the mountain (apart from those from the clouds above) are said by Peter. What about James and John? Why did they not speak up? What about Jesus? What did Moses and Elijah talk about with Jesus? It is left to us to assume, or believe. There is a famous picture by Raphael from 1520 showing Jesus, dominating in all his glory, flanked by Moses and Elijah, and the apostles lying on the ground before them, shielding their eyes against the glare from the brilliant whiteness. How could the apostles possibly recognise the two biblical figures for what they were; figures that would have lived and died at least 500 years earlier? We can only see the story as a parable, as the writer guides the reader into the next phase of Jesus' ministry. .

Why does the writer use Peter as the embodiment of the apostles' fear in the presence of the Lord? Is Peter, with all his doubts, with all his fears and all his human weaknesses, chosen again as the Rock upon which the church will be built? He who later on at the crucifixion denies him three times in a row. Peter can be seen as the unwitting hero of the story from the beginning, from Simon the fisherman to Peter the fisher of men, being groomed for finishing Jesus' mission, bringing Christianity into the world. On the mountain, alone with Jesus he suddenly becomes aware of the magnitude of the mission this man Jesus has taken

on. A mission larger than life, a mission that could only have come from above.

The transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain then is less about changes in Jesus, but a change in the way the apostles (Peter especially) and we see Jesus. A ghostly whiteness brings on a growing awareness of the scope of Jesus' commitment, of symbolic death and transfiguration.

I recently had the opportunity to see an old film again, from the 1970, I think it is called "the Shoes of the Fisherman". A moving story of a Priest in a Siberian slave labour camp being sent to a convention in Rome as the Russian church delegate. With his down to Earth vision of Christianity he finishes up being elected as the new pope. In a bold move to avoid a full scale war with a starving China he promises all the Vatican's resources to help give China the funds required to purchase the food its people need. The cardinals are of course outraged, but rather than negate his given word to the Chairman of China, the newly elected Pope hands back his signet ring to the conclave. He resigns. At that point one of the cardinals rises to face him and says, 'No, you are Peter! The word of Peter is the word of our Lord on this Earth. I stand with Peter'. At this point naturally all the others fall in line and world war three is avoided.

A very touching story. One that brought home to me the importance of the simple fisherman, Simon from Galilee, the Peter of the New Testament, and his belief.

A famous man once said, 'everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts'. But what happens when an opinion becomes fact? Or fact becomes an opinion? At what point does an opinion, a belief, turn into knowledge? When is it scientifically proven? When is it accepted by the majority of the population? when it fits the image it represents? To quote another famous saying given to a newspaperman caught between fact and fiction: "when facts become legend, forget the facts, you have to print the legend".

There has been great interest of late in the general public about the legend of the so-called rejected gospels. That interest has been fanned significantly by Dan Brown's blockbuster novel, "The Da Vinci Code." In that book, Brown builds a conspiracy theory into his plot, seeking to show that the books that make up the canonical New Testament were chosen in order to promote a particular agenda on the part of the church's hierarchy. Perhaps, Brown implies, the omitted books hold the key to new insights? The "Da Vinci Code" is a wonderfully exciting, well-written piece of fiction that, like many historical novels, deals with a period of history and with characters that actually lived. Yet Brown makes no claim that he is writing history. He blunders into a controversy which raised embarrassing questions about so-called religious "facts".

Jesus was a carpenter ... wasn't he?

Jesus invented the Eucharist ... didn't he?

Jesus died on the cross ... didn't he?

Paul knew all about Jesus ... didn't he?

Emperor Constantine was a Christian ... wasn't he?

Brown may be a theological midget, but he is a great and popular writer who probably had no inkling that his ideas would spark such indignation and

fear. When Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln wrote the book “Holy Blood, Holy Grail” 20 years ago, on which much of the Da Vinci Code is based, it hardly raised a feather. If they got away it, then why all this fuss now? Because Dan Brown has popularised doubt itself, and doubt raises the level of insecurity and fear. If you cannot trust your instinctive beliefs anymore, you must rely on facts and your presence of mind. And the responsibility of that can be frightening.

No two people believe exactly the same, I say it again, they never have. Even the apostles under the masterful guidance of Jesus argued amongst each other. That is what makes us individuals. But the trend towards promoting individual beliefs has become more fashionable in this age of New Age Religions. You could say Martin Luther himself took the first step by making the Bible accessible to everyone who could read. In those days though people could still adhere to a chosen belief for life. But today, in a world where the collective knowledge of humanity doubles every 10 years (which amounts to over a hundred fold increase in a single life-time), even an individual belief has to evolve over one’s lifetime to remain meaningful.

Our Templar founding fathers lived through an apocalyptic end of the world prophesy in the late 1830. In it itself it was a non-event, but one that woke up quite a few “believers” and may, in not a small measure, be responsible for the concept, the birth and the evolution of the Templar Vision.

Let us now sing another hymn, no 64, “Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König...”, verses 1, 2, 3 & 4

In a literate society there is no viable alternative to social evolution. We ourselves change, from day to day, and what we know today, what we believe today will be yesterday’s belief tomorrow. Compare the scriptures with what is acceptable religious belief and philosophy today! The God who prefers one human being to another, loves and protects only those that sacrifice and pray to him, the God who speaks out of the clouds to chosen people only and sacrifices on person for the sins of others, no longer makes sense to us.

That vision of God was an attempt by early society to make sense of human nature the way they understood it. Our vision of God has evolved, does evolve together with our scientific awareness, from day to day. I feel today’s consciousness has moved to a more holistic view of our place in the universe, the apparent conflict between science and religion is disappearing. We are starting to realise that there never was a real conflict. Only dogmatic arguments. Our understanding of God and Nature are becoming one, and its beautiful. The new trinity could be called God, Nature and man’s understanding.

I hope that religious belief and science will continue to evolve together, hand in hand towards a better understanding of ourselves and our environment. Belief has to be able to grow, to evolve. That does not detract from its value as a guiding force, it enhances it. The religious freedom to see Jesus as a man on a mission rather than a sacrificial lamb of God, is so much more revealing. It relates to our daily life and the freedom of choice we need, to function effectively. Man’s knowl-

edge is incomplete, I know, it will always be incomplete, like the kingdom of God, for there are no absolutes of anything, especially not truth. We can argue endlessly about what happened on Mt Tabor. Did it happen? Could it have happened? Did Peter imagine it? Is it a parable to make a point? Is my interpretation of it better than yours? It is important to let our belief (and our image of God) grow, and not get trapped in an outdated world vision.

Striving for greater awareness and better understanding of ourselves and the world around us is essential for us, you could call it even vital, for they are the prime ingredients of a Kingdom of God. They probably are the kingdom of God. Templer religion can never be just one belief. As I look around here I see before me a score of different beliefs.

To be a Templer is a conscious decision, nothing else; a 'set your mind to...' the diverse nature of beliefs; a diversity across the whole range of human experiences, limited only by socially accepted standards and consideration for others. In that sense, everyone is a Templer, some just don't know it yet.

Music

My thanks to Veronica for the music, to the unseen hands that arranged the Hall and the flowers, and a special thanks to you all for sharing this time with me.

Please help yourself to a cup of coffee and stay for a chat before you leave.

SUNDAY SERVICE 26 NOVEMBER IN BENTLEIGH

Musician Elisabeth Wagner

Hymns No 64, "Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König..." verses 1,2,3 & 4.

No 75, "Nun danket alle Gott..." Verse 1 and 2.

Text Mark 3: 31-35 "who is my mother and who are my brothers?"

Welcome to you all, and thank you for coming on this fine Sunday morning in Bentleigh. I am going to talk today about the saying attributed to Jesus "who is my mother and who are my brothers...", but let me lead you into the story in a round-about way to try and highlight the wider implications I see in it.

Not long ago I wrote a little report for the Astronomy Society Newsletter, that dealt with the changes in our understanding of cosmology over the last 400 years. Back then people were used to live in an ordered, mechanical Universe; everything in its place and a place for everything. For thousands of years the world around us mortals was understood to be static, everlasting from eternity to eternity. That's the way it seemed and that's the way it made sense: a three-tiered structure, an Earth, a Heaven above and youknow-what below. Whatever did not fit into the four obviously different elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Air became quintessence (the stuff beyond our five senses), or was attributed to the supernatural.

Technological advances over the last 400 years changed all that. You see, some 400 years ago astronomy woke up from its 1000 year Dornröschen sleep and became a science, again. Measurements became more and more refined and theories and hypotheses could be tested and proven or rejected. Suddenly rocks were no longer eternal, stars and galaxies moved and space became a malleable commodity.

It was in the year 1514, when the versatile Nicolaus Copernicus, Roman Catholic, mathematician, astronomer, jurist, physician, classical scholar, governor, administrator, diplomat, economist and soldier, proposed a new way to visualise the solar system by displacing the Earth from the centre of the universe. This suggestion, while being a monumental step in human thinking, was not entirely new. It had been tried several times before, with little support from the astronomical community, because by itself that does not convincingly improve our understanding of what we see in the sky. The odd behaviour of the Wandering Stars (Planets) was then most accurately described by the customary, time proven spheres and epicycles of Ptolemy of Alexandria.

Copernicus worried a lot about that, and his major work "On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres" was not published until 1543, the year Copernicus died. Sure, the proposal was novel, yes, but what did it achieve? Its predictive accuracy was worse than the thousand year old Ptolemaic system; it defied the visibly obvious and, of course, it was not in accordance with the scriptures. Copernicus had tried to promote its simpler, more appealing structure but failed to produce a convincing argument. History and common sense were against it. What in the

end made the difference, why it was eventually taken serious, was because forty years later the idea was picked up by Galileo and by Kepler. Their improved measurements on hand of a new technology, the telescope, and their ability to think outside the square (or the circle in this case) allowed to Earth to turn on its axis and become just another one of the known planets going around the sun on their elliptical orbits. It was only then that Copernicus' Sun-centred, the heliocentric proposal became the revolutionary step forward in our understanding of the Universe. Today it marks the starting point of modern astronomy and of modern science. It became the basis of the Cosmological Principle: none of us occupies a privileged, special place in the world. For centuries it had been agreed that convictions of faith were wholly compatible with the highest levels of reasoning, inquiry and creativity. Now young astronomers, scientists and scholars everywhere, were encouraged to reach beyond established dogma. The heavens had opened themselves to those prepared to go beyond common sense.

Let us sing together the hymn "Lobe den Herren..." No 64 verses 1,2,3 & 4.

People are reluctant to give up an idea, a way of thinking, they are used to. A philosophy, a religion handed down over the years has an intrinsic, time proven truth in it, that is hard to dismiss. But that truth need not have anything to do with being right or correct. It is just that by continued custom it has become a reflection of one's own needs. You have built your whole life around it, based all your assumptions on it, and no young (or old) upstart is going to tell you any different. That's just common sense. When Jesus started his messianic wanderings through Palestine he must have felt much like Copernicus. He was challenging a deeply established belief (a way of life no less with the Jewish people). Sure, his attitude to life, to society, to God was novel and exciting, yes, but what did it prove? How would it help the average person in the street? It was bordering on heresy, in fact it was heresy. Jesus not only challenged the authority of the reigning government, he promoted his own interpretation of the Jewish laws, such as working on the Sabbath, the definition of ritual cleanliness and of forgiving, the payment of taxes and, as in our text for today, the meaning of family members. It was against common sense.

It took many years and the insight of visionaries to eventually make sense of Jesus' message and shape it into a coherent belief. The Text for today comes from Mark 3 verse 31-35. Jesus was in Galilee, where he entered into a house with his disciples, and a large crowd followed him to hear him talk. By that time many of his critics and the Pharisees were saying that he was out of his mind, even possessed by, or in league with the devil. Beelzebub is the expression used here, and its meaning is variously given as a fallen angel, chief lieutenant of Lucifer, Lord of the Flies or Satan. John Milton in Paradise Lost wrote of Beelzebub's position in hell as "...than whom, Satan except, none higher sat."

When Jesus' family heard of those rumours they worried about him and came to take charge of him, to take him home. That is where we pick up the thread: "Then his mother and his brothers arrived, and, remaining outside sent in a message asking him to come out to them. When the word was brought to him

that his mother and brothers were outside asking for him, he replied, “who is my mother, who are my brothers?” looking around at those listening to him he said, “Here are my mothers and my brothers. Whosoever does the will of God is my brother, my sister, my mother.” –

We know this is not the first (nor the last) time Jesus has re-interpreted the traditional Jewish laws to suit his vision of a new world order. Here he refers to the fourth of the ten commandments (Lutheran numbering) which says: “Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you...” The obligation to honour one's parents is an obligation one owes to God, and one fulfils this obligation through one's actions towards one's parents.

Jesus' intent here may well have been to raise his listeners to a status normally reserved for family members, to show the importance he attaches to their sincere belief in his teachings. Family ties were considered very important in the society of the time, and some people even today are troubled by the seeming conflict in this passage between Jesus and his family. It does imply a certain lack of respect for his family and their support. When we transcribe that episode into today's social environment it is easy to see the concern the family would have felt for Jesus' welfare and his future. He had no steady job, probably no trade qualifications and no visible means of support. His circle of friends and followers were not much better. The group survived on the goodwill of the people they met in their apparently aimless wanderings. We would be justified in thinking, here was a person that needed looking after. Many excuses can be made about his strange behaviour in this little story. May be he did not want to explain himself to his mother in front of the crowd; he did not want to interrupt the flow of the ongoing discussions; perhaps he was planning on seeing them afterwards anyway. It is possible he was just embarrassed.

I remember a story my brother used to tell us, how embarrassed he was one day when, playing school football in Wilhelma, our mother interrupted play by bringing his lunch, he had forgotten to take in the morning, onto the football field. Mama-Kindle, they used call him for that. Whatever Jesus' motivation was, could he not have had the same effect on the people present had he invited his family to come in and join in the discussions? Was he worried they might make a public scene, show their disapproval of his lifestyle? A little later on (in chapter 6), when Jesus did visit his home town Nazareth, he is actually reported as saying words to that effect: "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own house." So, is this what is all about, honour? or is there another point to the story? – The story's significance is heightened by the fact it is copied almost verbatim at Matthew 12: 46-50 and in Luke 8: 19-21.

Jesus' answer, that only those who follow him are his family, could mean that his attitude towards the established rules of society had changed. Changed to such an extent that he feels he has to show that ties to his kingdom of God and to those who want to share in it, come before family ties. This theme in fact occurs several times in the gospels: When Peter says they have left everything to follow Jesus, and Jesus then lists the great rewards they will get for following him; or when he dismisses the excuse to first bury the father with "Leave the dead to bury

their own dead..." and, when one man, who wants to follow Jesus asks if he could just say farewell to his family first, he rejects him with "No one, having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

To be part of his vision demanded a total commitment, no compromise, it is second to none. If your mind is still on your bodily needs, if you are worried about your family, your possessions or your money, then forget about the kingdom. It is not for you. In that sense his disregard for mother and brother inferred above was about the sense of urgency he attached to the meaning of his mission. Nothing was more important, not even his own family. It was second to none. This picture of Jesus is in stark contrast with the compassion he showed for those unable to help themselves. Jesus, the lamb of God, the meek and mild, the healer and the comforter, the king of peace.

As I said before, people have puzzled about this conflict in Jesus' portrayal, and you come across many theories in literature on what happened. Bishop Spong, who has written much about Christianity in what I would call the sensible, down to Earth way, looks at it this way: We now know the three synoptic gospels were composed long after the earthly life of Jesus had ended. Probably two generations later. And although it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what is genuine Jesus and what has been added or embellished by well-meaning followers, it has become obvious that at least the additional miracles ascribed to Jesus in the later Gospels were added afterwards to make Jesus' messages more believable by linking them up with the scriptures. There is no virgin birth in Mark, the earliest gospel, no star of Bethlehem. The story starts when John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the river Jordan.

A fascinating narrative in Matthew and Luke is further proof how miracle stories came into the Christian tradition. These two gospel writers take a story from Mark, describing how John the Baptist was imprisoned and executed, and expand it. John in prison sends a messenger to Jesus asking the messianic question: "Are you the one who is to come or must we look for another?" It is a question that could not have arisen until the debate about whether or not Jesus was the anticipated messiah began to be debated in earnest, which only occurred long after his death. The way Jesus responds to John's question is critical. He does not say 'yes' or 'no.' Rather, he says, "go back and tell John what you see and hear, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and the mute sing." Jesus is portrayed as claiming that these signs have gathered around him, and the hidden reference is to the 35th chapter of Isaiah, written in the 8th century B.C.E where the prophet Isaiah wrote about the signs that would accompany the dawning of the Kingdom of God. The pain of the world, he said, would be transformed, wholeness would replace brokenness and perfection would overcome imperfection. And how would people know that the Kingdom of God had entered human society? Isaiah answered that question with what he called the signs of the Kingdom:

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy..."

Jesus in his answer to John the Baptist claims that Isaiah's signs of this in-

breaking (anbrechende) Kingdom were now present. Go tell John what you see: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk and the mute sing. When the Kingdom comes, the gospel writers were saying, all of those things that represent the reign of God must become visible. So, when people ascribed messianic claims to Jesus, they also had to attribute messianic acts to his presence. That is how the tradition developed in which a miraculous birth and healing miracles were attributed to Jesus. The basic principles of Jesus' philosophy, of Christianity, were so far removed from the "common sense" of the people at the time that they had to be linked back to the original biblical prophecies to make them acceptable. And to a lot of Christians today the miracles are still the core of their religious tenet.

Perhaps, Spong says, the time has come to recognize that Christianity was never meant to be about religion; it is about life. The ability to live with integrity in the midst of the insecurities of life on Earth is the goal of Christianity. Religion seeks to control life with guilt. Christianity seeks to free people to be all that they can be. There is a vast difference. Perhaps it will take a Religionless Christianity to open us to the full meaning of Life. That's Spong at his best!

Let us now sing the second of our two hymns, No 75 "Nun danket alle Gott, mit Herzen und mit Händen" verses 1 and 2.

We humans may well be once again at one of those points in our intellectual and social evolution, where common sense cannot be relied on to be in our best, long-term interest. Knowledge that does not continuously grow and expand to include new ideas, in time becomes its own dogma, supported by so-called common sense. What are our priorities today to ensure society's future? Is it global warming? Is it to eliminate hunger and disease, or no more wars?

In a discussion I had with a friend recently, after watching the disgraceful behaviour of the G20 protestors, we focussed on the lack of so called common sense by the people carrying out such wilful destruction. And we realised, critically analysed, common sense is not very common at all. Instead it is a very personal issue, concerned only with personal safety and well-being and that which we believe in ourselves. Only when those issues are under threat will common sense start to dictate our action. It is like DNA, it takes no wider, social responsibility. Its commonness lies purely in the fact that we all, individually, seem to have it.

So, if an appeal to common sense can't stop conflict, fighting, war, religious strife, terrorism and global warming, what else is there that we can appeal to and cultivate? A sense of community? Templar Spirit? A religion-less Christianity? Or...?

I shall leave the thought with you.

Music

Thank you Elisabeth for the music. My thanks to the unseen hands that organised the flowers and thank you all for coming and spending the time together in this Hall

APPENDIX

HOW THE MIND WORKS

Thoughts on a book by Steven Pinker

The brain is one of Nature's most complicated structures, and the mind very likely its most closely guarded secret. But their combined influence on life and its progress on Earth is phenomenal. From the basic bodily functions to calculating and predicting future events, it spans motor control, sensory perceptions, language, intelligence and philosophical aspirations.

For centuries people have, in trying to understand the brain's functions, assigned certain functions of the mind to finite parts of the brain, even named sections accordingly, only to find in time higher levels of interconnections involving seemingly unrelated sectors. And in amongst all this accumulated evolution there arose a new identity, the mental capacity we label consciousness.

What is consciousness? Is it awareness? Is it free will? Is it something that only arises with a certain level of complexity? Or is it (as I believe it is) present, in primitive form, already in any system that includes some sort of feedback loop. Any system that senses changes and responds to, reacts to, or compensates for a change. Such as a heater with a thermostat, an automatic door with a limit switch, anti-locking brakes on passenger cars. Normally consciousness is not recognized (acknowledged) as such at this level. We say that is just a machine. A machine does not know what it is doing, or why it is doing what it is doing. We are different! Are we not?

At a time when artificial intelligence is becoming a technological industry, we are still struggling to define intelligence's basic concepts: How do we think, how do we interpret and store sensory inputs, how indeed form philosophical thoughts, what role does religion play in our thinking, what is this "I AM"? Some call it the last great barrier to the understanding of life, the biggest hurdle, the challenge for the 21st century: Who are we? Who am I? Whatever this new century may bring in other innovations, you can be sure the mind and consciousness will rank high on the agenda.

Steven Pinker is Professor of Psychology and Director of a Centre for Cognitive Neuroscience, and his latest book is called *How the Mind Works*. "Here Darwin meets Turing", said one of the commentators, "...it is a meeting of the theories of evolution and of computation". The book makes for good reading. I enjoyed it.

I like for instance the way he talks about the eye, how we see things: "It took civilisation five thousand years of trial and error to represent pictorial perspective on paper, and only during the last hundred years man slowly unravelled, bit by bit, how our eyes enable us to perceive a three dimensional image." The physicist Charles Wheatstone was the first, in 1838, to draw attention to the phenomena.

Our mind combines the two two-dimensional outputs of the retinae with the parallax angle of the left and the right eye at the point of focus. Note, this is not the same as judging distance, which is done by sensing the deformation of the

eye's lens needed for correct focus. If you close one eye you still have a feeling of distance, but no appreciation of depth. You need two images for that. The intricate 'machinery' of the brain picks out the minute difference in the two separate pictures from the eyes and relates this information to the known angle of their separation. (The imaginary triangle formed from the apex that you are looking at to the distance between your eyes.)

In nature it is of vital importance for survival to extract as much information as possible, as quickly as possible, from what the eyes see. Camouflage of a predator can often only be separated from the natural background by recognizing the predator's shape as a three dimensional object. This you can only do with stereo vision. Whenever the mind is presented with a picture it immediately searches for information that could suggest three-dimensional depth, such as similar patterns of varying size, or recurring dots spaced differently.

In our computer picture below arranged co-ordinates make letters stand out against the flat surface. See if you can see the message hidden in the picture.

A hint: Use the two asterisks shown at the top to let your eyes un-focus. (As if you were looking through the paper). Once you see two pairs of stars, concentrate on the two middle ones until they merge, then let your focus drift into the centre of the picture and watch four lines of large text miraculously rise up from the background. I won't tell you what it says, you will know it when you see it.

All but some four percent of people have stereo vision. Most deficiencies can be traced to some childhood problem with one or other of the eyes. Stereo vision is an age-acquired ability. Like many of the sensory and mental faculties such as sight, language syntax etc., the mind must be able to practise it, exercise it, during a critical period in a child's development to activate and condition the function. History data shows that the window of opportunity for stereo vision is very short. In animals often only days from birth. In humans the stereo vision circuits in the brain are functional at the age of four months and "wired" set by the age of two. Any extended periods of visual handicap during this time can seriously affect stereo vision in later life.

What I find fascinating in this continuing journey of self-discovery is how we gradually recognise the various principles that make us humans tick, make us function the way we do. All this ability to cope with modern life, with technology, our ability to drive a motor car, to sit in front of a computer and type an essay, to appreciate music, is using our brain in a way that could not even have been imagined when it evolved to its present size and shape. Isn't this amazing? We are inter-actively re-defining our brain's functioning as we go along, from stone-age, through bronze-and-iron philosophies to the computer information technology, moulding its capabilities by the environment we create and relate with.

Interaction with the environment is the most natural, the most practical way to shape a person's thinking. I feel, the biblical commandment "ändert euren Sinn" (change your attitude) or the "love your neighbour" on its own, without an instruction how to go about this task, is just wishful thinking. That's why it takes so many explanations, they fill the rest of the Bible. The desired attitude should evolve

naturally, in an environment conducive to fostering such an attitude. We use our immediate environment as functional parts of our mind. For a better society (the Kingdom of God) to become reality, a living mind has to appreciate the need for such a condition. The idea must harmonise with life's struggle for survival, for evolution has made Life itself the reward, and consciousness is rooted in self-preservation.

How The Mind Works? Everyone should read the book. Given a fertile environment our mind will grow to meet any challenge we can understand. The brain, and life itself have an unlimited ability to do so.

History teaches us that.



