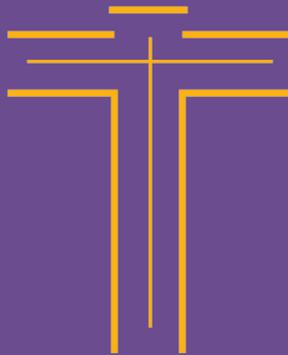


Temple Society Australia

*A Collection of*

**Understandings  
from a Religious  
Perspective**



**Published by**

Temple Society Australia  
152 Tucker Road  
Bentleigh VIC 3204

**P:** 03 9557 6713

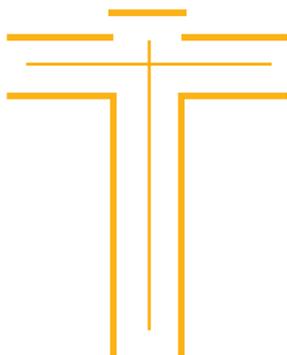
**E:** [tsa@templesociety.org.au](mailto:tsa@templesociety.org.au)

**W:** [www.templesociety.org.au](http://www.templesociety.org.au)

**June 2013**

*A Collection of*

**Understandings  
from a Religious  
Perspective**



Temple Society Australia

# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>1. Identity</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Temple Society Australia.....	1
<b>2. Beliefs</b> .....	<b>2</b>
God.....	2
From “Religious Perspective”.....	2
Selected Excerpts.....	2
The Temple Society’s Perception of God.....	2
Jesus of Nazareth’s Perception of God.....	3
Attempts to describe what we cannot comprehend.....	6
Jesus.....	9
From “Religious Perspective”.....	9
Selected Excerpts.....	9
From the Hanau Statements.....	9
Jesus is our example.....	10
Jesus’s main message.....	10
The Mystery of Jesus.....	11
Jesus as the Yardstick.....	11
The Resurrection – how we understand it.....	12
The Song of Praise to Love.....	16
The Kingdom of God.....	17
From “Religious Perspective”.....	17
Selected Excerpts.....	17
What did Jesus mean by the Kingdom of God?.....	17
God’s kingdom – the central theme of the Christian Gospel.....	20
A State of Perfection?.....	22
Thinking of God’s kingdom in a new way.....	23
Real and dynamic.....	24
An inner and an outer state.....	26

Mankind.....	27
From “Religious Perspective”.....	27
Selected Excerpts.....	27
Improvement through practice.....	27
Can we change the world?.....	28
The Bible.....	31
From “Religious Perspective”.....	31
Selected Excerpts.....	31
Our conscience and reason influence our religious understanding.....	31
Not <i>the</i> Word of God, but words of God.....	33
Take the stories seriously, but not literally.....	33
<b>3. Community.....</b>	<b>35</b>
From “Religious Perspective”.....	35
Selected Excerpts.....	35
Islands in a sea of secularity.....	35
A decade on, Australian-born Templers wrote as the Temple Society turned 150.....	36
Home base for individual faith journeys.....	36
<b>4. How we see ourselves.....</b>	<b>38</b>
From “Religious Perspective”.....	38
Selected Excerpts.....	39
Our name and purpose.....	39
Establishing and maintaining a progressive Christian community in Australia.....	42
How Australian-born Templers see our Community....	44
<b>5. References.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>6. Further reading.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>7. Authors.....</b>	<b>49</b>

## Glossary

TS	Temple Society
TSA	Temple Society Australia
TGD	Tempelgesellschaft in Deutschland
TR	<i>Templer Record</i> (monthly circular in Australia)
Warte	<i>Die Warte des Tempels</i> (monthly circular in Germany)

# Preface

This publication expands on the statements printed in the booklet *Religious Perspective – Identity, Faith and Practical Concerns* by the Temple Society Australia (TSA) in June 2000.<sup>1</sup> Its contents elaborate, under the same headings, on the brief and broadly-expressed statements of the publication from over ten years ago.

During the intervening decade, much has changed in the world. However, the Elders of the TSA feel that not much, if anything, has changed in the religious core values and beliefs of the Temple Society, from those established by our forefathers. Indeed, “progressive” Christians in many countries are coming to similar realisations and are beginning to reflect concepts consistent with those long espoused by the Temple Society.

This 2013 publication therefore contains mainly selected excerpts from important Templar writings and some religious services of past Presidents and Elders, edited, translated and, where deemed appropriate, expressed in the language of today.

The thoughts contained within remain relevant to the values and beliefs of Templars today.

Hermann Ralph Uhlherr, Mark Herrmann,  
Dr Rolf Beilharz, Herta Uhlherr

---

<sup>1</sup>These statements were agreed by the then President working closely with Elders in both Regions. The German version is called *Glaube und Selbstverständnis der Templer* – published by the TGD, 2000.

# Identity

## Temple Society Australia

The Temple Society is an independent Christian community not affiliated with any other Christian church or denomination. We are, however, a member of the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria.

“Temple” stands for the spiritual temple of God, embodied in the individual (1 Cor. 3:16) as well as in the community, whose members – motivated by compassion for their fellow beings – want to act together as living stones of this temple (1 Peter 2:5a).

In this sense, free from dogmatic ties and open to spiritual diversity, the Temple Society strives to establish and nurture Christian fellowship in a community environment. Templers recognise a bond with all who, led by their conscience, work for the good of humanity.

The Temple Society’s aim, expressed in its chosen motto

*Set your mind on God’s kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well*  
(Matt. 6:33),

affirms the seeking of God’s kingdom on earth as our foremost task.

For Templers the twin commandments of love

*Love God with all your being,  
and love your neighbour as yourself* (Matt. 22:37-39)

sum up Jesus’ central message about what he envisaged as God’s kingdom on earth, and show a practical way of working towards our aim in daily life.

## 2.

# Beliefs

## God

### *From “Religious Perspective”*

*We see God as the source of life and centre of all being, a transcending spiritual reality, acting within and beyond this world.*

*To us God is also personal in so far as individuals can commune with him, knowing that they are responsible to God and are accepted by him.*

*We are conscious that the true nature of God is beyond human comprehension, and we acknowledge the limitations of statements about God.*

## Selected Excerpts

### **The Temple Society’s Perception of God**

**We believe in one God.** – Just as any human achievement, be it material or spiritual, testifies to the ability of its producer or creator and the level of his intelligence and skill, so the universe is evidence of *its* creator and his infinite wisdom, whether we observe it on a large scale like astronomers, or on a small, even minute one, with the eyes of natural scientists. Whether we call this creator God, spirit, elemental will, elemental force, reality or whatever, is of secondary importance.

**We believe in a will of God.** – We recognise this will in **nature** and in the laws ruling it. We recognise it in the **spiritual** sphere, in the nature

of man and the consequences of his actions. To counterbalance the drives serving the physical, God has endowed man's being with a yearning for happiness and inner peace. This feeling is achieved when man does "good deeds", that is, when he overcomes his egotism. This yearning also acts as a guardian who remains quiet for as long as his ward is on the right path, the path willed by God, but becomes restless and creates a feeling of dissatisfaction when man strays from this path and acts contrary to God's will. God has given man the **freedom** to choose his own way, but has also burdened him with the **responsibility** for his choices. Each choice has consequences, beneficial or disastrous, as we can clearly recognise – and learn from – by observing the history of mankind.

**We believe that love of our fellow man** and compassion for all of God's creatures **is the best way of loving God** and serving him. We also believe it to be the only way to reach the goal, namely a kingdom of happiness and of inner peace, a kingdom which is in harmony with God's will, and which we therefore call *God's kingdom*.

**We hope** – we have no certainty – **for a life after death**, a continuation of spiritual development after bodily death, without speculating about the *how* and the *where*; we **trust** that God's fatherly love will let his creatures have what is best for them. To us, it is far **more important to make use of the present, of which we are sure, than to reflect on an uncertain future**. If we do our duty here on Earth, we can be certain that God will do his share and that "all the rest will come to us as well", as Jesus says.

Christian Rohrer, Temple Society President 1911-1934,  
in *Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

## **Jesus of Nazareth's Perception of God**

Christoph Hoffmann's spiritual work and his insight saved the Temple Society from having to regard Jesus as 'the second person in the Godhead', as is the case in the Christian Churches. As a human being

and as a true son of his people, Jesus has given us a clear picture of how he sees God through the testimonies in the Gospels of his words and deeds. Its main features can be summarised in four points:

1. **“God is spirit”**, says Jesus to the Samaritan woman (John 4:24). This is a perception of far-reaching significance, which removes any humanisation and represents immense progress compared to the first pre-Prophetic stage in the Old Testament where God is the God of the Covenant who journeys with his people or has his seat in the temple.

2. **“God is one”** [or “God is the one Lord”, Mark 12:29]. In fact, the prophets had already indicated this, but not with such clarity and certainty. This recognition of **one** God for the whole world seems extraordinarily important to Jesus, as we can see from the answer he gives to the question: which is the most important commandment? “Hear me, Israel, the Lord, your God is **One God!**”

Jesus thus advocates **absolute monotheism in contrast to the Churches which use his name**; they obscure the concept of the divine by splitting it into three. He describes the duty to serve this **one** God and to love him as the highest duty, along with only one other: love of neighbour. This commandment, according to Jesus, contains all the laws and teachings of Moses and the prophets. This is perfectly plausible, for where the commandment of **love** is followed, all laws and regulations, which only emerged as protection against human selfishness, are rendered redundant.

3. **“No one is good except God alone”** (Mark 10:18). These words of Jesus are confirmed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke when, upon being addressed as “good master”, he reprimands the speaker by saying “why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone”. This response also tells us

that he did not identify himself with God, even if he does **feel at one** with the Father, namely in that which he has recognised as God's will.

4. "**God is the Father of all**". There are enough passages in the Gospels where Jesus proclaims God as our Father, such as the Lord's Prayer, for one. **He considers all human beings children of God who may approach him, their loving Father, at any time.** What tremendous progress, compared to the grim, vengeful God of the first stage.

Jesus took great care not to put forward abstract doctrines and concepts in the manner of the philosophers; **to him, God was reality, for he felt him within.** He did not need to speculate about God's existence or to produce evidence of God's existence. He had no need to; to him it was self-evident. He felt God within himself as a being full of a father's kindness and love for his creatures, who only wants the best for all human beings. He shows this in wonderful images when he points to the lilies in the field and the birds in the sky: "and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more than they?" (Matt. 6). Tirelessly, he **praises God's love to strengthen his listeners' trust in God:** "Do not worry, your heavenly Father knows what you need" he says to the faint-hearted, but not to the indolent, lest they sit and wait for God to take care of them. He does not speak against making prudent provision, but against becoming stressed by the worry of everyday life and the struggle to get your daily bread.

There is another important element in Jesus' message of God's fatherly love. It **completely does away with others mediating between man and God**, be they priests or saints, for a child goes straight to his father and his father listens to his child.

Christian Rohrer  
in *Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

## Attempts to describe what we cannot comprehend

We cannot comprehend God. For most of us the image of the *creator* probably makes the most sense. The infinite cosmos and the endless diversity of phenomena suggest in an almost compelling way this image of an infinite Spirit that created this wonderful order and that is at work in all there is. Others surely feel the same: in the face of the beauty of this order, we believe we sense this Spirit and feel close to it.

We can experience God this way when we contemplate the natural world around us with open senses and an open mind. But is this concept enough for us? It has no connection to our own personal life. As long as we see God just as the creator of a marvellous order, he remains *impersonal*. We – and this we includes the majority of people with any religious sensibility at all – are **looking for a personal God**. The issue is not whether God is a person (irrelevant here) but whether he is *aware of us as a person*. We are looking for a God who is not indifferent to how we lead our life, who helps us to manage our life so that it leads to something good for ourselves and for others, who forgives us our transgressions, and who guides and hold us even beyond death. We find no evidence for such a God in nature. That is why we – people of all religions – **create** images, **concepts of God**, to get closer to him.

It is not at the beginning of the Bible, but at the beginning of the Jewish religion that we find the Ten Commandments. The second one says: you shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness... (Exodus 20:4). This means that God is Spirit, he has no form. He is bigger than we can imagine him and it is belittling to confine him to an earthly human image. This prohibition to make images articulates the wonderful, still valid insight of early Judaism... that God is unimaginably immense and way beyond our understanding.

The paradox, however, is that precisely because God is so great and so incomprehensible, we can speak of him *only* in images – in word pictures. The Old Testament already does this, frequently and in

different forms – very rarely and then only by implication in the form of a vision. Even Moses, the chosen prophet, is not allowed to see God's face, for *no mortal can see my face and live* (Exodus 33:20). This metaphorical expression tells us that human beings cannot comprehend or recognise God.

In the Psalms, God's **attributes** are praised: as the creator, the good shepherd, the judge, his justice, mercy, omnipresence, omniscience, forgiveness. Taken all together, the result is a magnificent picture of God – and one that contains contradictions. It is possible that each of the psalmists is singing about his own experience and understanding of God and thus reflecting one aspect of God. None of them could know everything about God either.

Jesus adds a new aspect to this picture of God: that of a **father**. This image, too, cannot depict the reality of God. But I feel this is the image in which we are most likely to comprehend him. And this picture does not contradict the reality we experience every day.

What does it mean when Jesus speaks of God as our Father? Closeness, intimacy, for a start. A God who is like a father sees me as a person and takes me seriously. Jesus never tires of emphasising this connection: your father knows what you need before you even ask him (Matt. 6:8). Or: are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than any number of sparrows (Matt. 10:29-30).

This implies a further aspect associated with the father image: **trust**. A baby or a toddler is totally helpless on its own and yet it is not afraid. It depends on its father or mother to meet all its needs. The image tells us if you trust God like that, you need not be afraid.

But does this image accord with our reality? Does God give us everything we need? We often feel this is not so, and forget that a child does not always get what it wants either.

I think that something similar applies to our relationship with God. Often we cannot understand the ways he leads us or others. In desperation we ask: why did this have to happen? Sometimes we see later why something that seemed harsh and senseless at first was good and necessary. Sometimes we don't. The unfathomable distance between our understanding and God remains. We only ever see a small, subjective part of reality and not the whole.

Still, what the father image expresses more than anything else remains: parents *love* their children, even when they see their faults and weaknesses; they love them as a person, *just as they are*. Not only children, we adults, too, need this *acceptance* above all else. Some people do not receive it from human beings, but trusting that the God who made us as we are also accepts us as we are can uphold us even when we find it hard to accept ourselves.

In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus summarised and made very clear his picture of God as a father. For me, this is the most beautiful parable in the entire Bible. It shows how God treats humanity and each one of us. It helps us get a glimpse of what

we can never understand fully.

Dr Brigitte Hoffmann, Regional Head TGD 2001-2007,  
from a service in Stuttgart, 21.7.2007

Translated by Herta Uhlherr

# Jesus

## *From “Religious Perspective”*

*Contrary to the present teaching of many other Christian denominations, Jesus is, to us, a human being, divinely inspired and as close to God as very few others, if any, have been. He taught us and showed us by his example the essential guidelines we should use for our lives: striving for the kingdom of God by trust in God and love of neighbour.*

*Equally, we recognise him not as God become man, saving us through his sacrificial death. We see him as a saviour because of his vision of a loving God whose presence can be met without fear in the depths of one's own being. Jesus' preparedness to die expresses his dedication to his task and his trust in God.*

*Jesus' resurrection is, to us, above all a spiritual event. We acknowledge it as a manifestation of a spiritual existence and its effective working beyond death, potentially possible for all human beings.*

*This we see as bringing into focus the importance of the Gospel reports that Jesus' resurrection appearances to his disciples enabled them to experience this spiritual existence, and, in a life transformed, awakened in them a totally new confidence in their faith and a new sense of mission.*

## **Selected Excerpts**

### **From the Hanau Statements**

We hold the view that the significance of Jesus Christ must be expressed in concepts which can be understood today. Many testimonies from the past and the present provide evidence that when one encounters Jesus, one is also experiencing God's love and his challenging call. He radiates liberating and healing powers; he awakens hope and confidence; he calls for unbounded humanity.

*Hanauer Sätze des Bundes für Freies Christentum, 1968*  
(The Hanau Statements of the Free Christian Network)

## Jesus is our example

We see Jesus as the ideal human being, whom we try to emulate by using his message as a guideline and his life as a model for all our thoughts and actions.

Christian Rohrer  
in *Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

## Jesus's main message

He requires individuals as well as entire nations to be ready and willing to help establish God's kingdom: **Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else** (Matt. 6:33). This is the core and the central issue of everything he spoke and taught.

He therefore makes the advent of God's kingdom dependent on human action, not on waiting for it, as if this kingdom would one day descend from the sky into the lap of those waiting. No, this goal demands *work*, which is why it matters that the idea of the Kingdom of God takes root in every individual and brings about a change of heart. Only then will decrees and laws produce better social conditions. **Individuals must be willing to put the common good before private greed, and the spirit of sacrifice before selfishness.**

Jesus, who described this demand as the will of God, made it the basis of his own life and remained true to it in all situations. He did not back off from the worst predicament, death itself, when it came to standing up for his conviction.

**“To serve God in daily life”;** this is what marks a true human being and a true Christian. To love God and to serve him is the most important commandment, and the one that is equivalent to it is **love your neighbour as yourself**. If this commandment is fulfilled, then God's kingdom has come. This is the key to all his parables and sayings.

**This commandment exists for all people and can be understood by everyone**, regardless of their cultural level or nationality, even though individual people have different gifts, as indeed do nations.

Christian Rohrer  
in *Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

## **The Mystery of Jesus**

My personal view tends towards believing that **there is a mystery surrounding the person of Jesus and his work**. I am prepared to accept this mystery, whilst refraining from the questionable attempt to get to the bottom of it. In my view it is impossible for man to gain ultimate clarity about Jesus the person and his work. For me Jesus is *more* than a man, although he entered history as a man and therefore was a man.

Personally I consider both the **deification** and the **humanisation of Jesus** (“brother Jesus”) as *one-sided*. I fear that human arrogance (referred to as “coming of age”) and a lack of critical self-appraisal could play a role, because the huge difference in quality between Jesus, as he is described in the New Testament, and other people in the past and present ought not to be denied.

Dr Richard Hoffmann, Temple Society President 1970-1988,  
in a Seminar on *Fragen des Christseins*  
(Questions about being a Christian), October 1978

## **Jesus as the Yardstick**

This question leads us Christians back to the Bible. Luther (who despite his fundamentalist outlook dared to declare individual sections inferior) once said that everything “that motivated Jesus” was good. **Jesus must remain our yardstick**, otherwise we cease being Christians and run the risk of subjecting ourselves to dangerous yardsticks.

We cannot know, with absolute certainty, what exactly Jesus did say and what he did not say. When we look at the Gospels and the Letters of the Apostles in combination, what is surprising is that, in spite of all the contradictions and distortions in individual details, we gain a **very clear idea of what Jesus wanted above all**, not only what he said, but how he lived. I summarise this in three closely interrelated points:

a **new trust in God** as the Father, who accepts us time and again;

a **new relationship between human beings**, consisting of love and the willingness to accept others;

and, as the sum of these two, **working toward a Kingdom of God**.

To me this appears a reliable and legitimate yardstick for a critical reading of the Bible and for gathering non-biblical experiences.

Dr Brigitte Hoffmann  
in *Die Warte des Tempels*, July/August 1990  
Also in the *Templer Handbook*

## **The Resurrection – how we understand it**

**Easter** is the festival of Christ's rising from the dead. It is the **most important festival in Christianity**. The New Testament gives us the message: "Jesus died on the cross and was buried, but death did not destroy him; he was resurrected by God to a new life. We know this and we testify to this, because he appeared to us, because we have seen him".

This testimony contradicts human experience to such an extent that, then and now, it seems incredible. It has met with ridicule and derision; it was fervently believed, and between these extremes there are numerous attempts of all kinds to explain it.

How did the Christians know that Jesus rose from the dead? The New Testament tells us where the knowledge originated. The **oldest report** in which the question of the resurrection is dealt with in detail appears in Chapter 15 of **the Apostle Paul's first letter to the community in Corinth**. In answer to some Corinthians saying the resurrection was “nothing”, Paul replied with unmistakable clarity that the resurrection of Jesus was the **basic fact of the new faith**. Without the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity would lose its foundation and the Christians would be the most pitiable people in the world. However, this they were not, for the very reason that the resurrection was a fact. All doubting Corinthians could rely on this fact.

To corroborate this, Paul specified that this resurrection was first evidenced by the Scriptures. By this he meant that it was **foretold** in the holy literature of Judaism. For the **Jewish Christians** this was compelling proof that resurrection, which runs counter to normal human experience, was possible. For these Jewish Christians all that was required now was for them to convince themselves that this had actually happened in Jesus' case.

For the **gentile Christians** – presumably a significant percentage of the community in Corinth – this scriptural evidence was not compelling, because they did not know Jewish piety. They required **factual proof of the resurrection**. Paul then had to provide proof to the Jewish and gentile Christians that the resurrection **actually occurred**. He does this immediately by citing the accounts of the various **appearances of the risen Christ** to persons who could be questioned, provided they were still alive.

Paul refrains from any oriental embellishments of these appearances. He simply says: **Jesus was seen** by Cephas [Peter], afterwards by the Twelve, then by over five hundred of the brothers at once, then by James, afterwards by all the Apostles and finally by me. We testify to the truth of the resurrection based on personal perception. **Why should we testify to something like that if it was not true?** We do not gain any advantage through our testimony, instead we are

derided, taunted and persecuted, and our lives are even threatened! So why should we lie?

Certainly – so Paul continues – one has to **ask oneself how this resurrection is to be understood**, as it cannot be understood purely physically, because that would be absurd. However, there are many examples in nature which may be used as an analogy to the resurrection. The kernel of wheat turns into a plant; the sun, the moon and the stars all shine, but give off a different light; human beings, cattle, fish and birds all have flesh, but different kinds of flesh. Resurrection could well be similar: physical man has a “natural” body, risen man has a **“spiritual” body**; the physical body perishes through death, the spiritual body appears in the resurrection – it carries the image of the natural body yet is something fundamentally different. **More cannot be said about it**, because nothing more is known.

In our opinion, this means that Paul did not want the resurrection understood as a physical occurrence, but rather as a **spiritual event**.

We think that Paul knew the story of the empty tomb and omitted it intentionally.

From our personal viewpoint, **Jesus’ resurrection, as reported by Paul, poses fewer difficulties than the belief in the “resurrection of the body”** which the Church teaches, especially if the bodily resurrection is understood to be physical. Already Paul considered this to be absurd, although the Gospels hint at it by emphasising the empty tomb, and the formulation of the creed also suggests it. Why then did the Church decide to adopt it as doctrine?

It probably did so for many reasons. Firstly, it wanted to differentiate the Christian interpretation of the resurrection from corresponding ideas of Jewish piety on the one hand, and from the heathen religion and philosophy on the other. This **differentiation** became a **necessity of Christian self-definition**, as Christianity increasingly expanded and in the process clashed with differing views.

Secondly, the formulation “resurrection of the body” has a *graphic quality*, it is more easily grasped than the Pauline formulation of the “spiritual body”, which is only a kind of image of the physical being.

Thirdly, the “resurrection of the body” is attractive, because one can imagine that one no longer has to bear all the ailments and infirmities of old age, but will be young, beautiful and healthy again. As naive as this may sound, in our view much of the attraction of the Church doctrine of the resurrection of the body lies in the **wishful thinking** reflected in the minds of some Christians.

Since we Templers are bound by neither a formulated creed nor the doctrine of inspiration, we wonder **how Jesus of Nazareth** may have **perceived the resurrection**. In the foreshadowing of the cross, reference is made to the resurrection. But it does not say there how it is to be understood. Instead, Jesus is reported to have said elsewhere that the children of the resurrection were like angels and were God’s children; the requirements and rules which applied to ordinary mortals no longer applied to them. In the same context, Jesus also said that life and death were not different before God; **to God the dead were also still living**.

The New Testament does not report anything further. Some may regret this, but it can also be said that this brief, modest and profound **statement contains everything that is necessary** and sufficient for us.

Dr Richard Hoffmann, in the *Templer Record*, March 1975  
Also in the *Templer Handbook*

## The Song of Praise to Love

By pointing out to humanity the way to a life filled with God, by showing human beings a way out of fear and guilt through the way he lived his own life to its ultimate fulfilment, Jesus redeemed mankind. **The fact that his death on the cross occurred cannot, in our view, have a redeeming effect in itself.** This is achieved only through the meaning and significance the event gained because Jesus, to his last breath, did not waver a hair's breadth from the path his faith showed him. In his struggle with opposing forces, even whilst faced with certain, painful death on the cross, he followed God's will unconditionally.

Dr Alfred Weller, in *Die Warte des Tempels*, January 1953  
Also in the *Templer Handbook*

# The Kingdom of God

## *From “Religious Perspective”*

*The kingdom of God is the core of Jesus' message. It involves a continuing perfecting of humanity and the world, a closer relationship of people to God and to each other. It includes earthly reality but is not confined to it.*

*We see this kingdom not as a cataclysm coming at the end of time, but as a continuing development in which we are expected to participate now, even if its full realisation is beyond our understanding. To us, it remains essential and obligatory to focus on striving for this perfection.*

*Therefore our motto is Matt. 6:33:*

*Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice  
before everything else, and all the rest  
will come to you as well.*

## Selected Excerpts

### What did Jesus mean by the Kingdom of God?

The Temple Society places the idea of God's kingdom at the centre of the Christian message, and rightly so. However, it very much depends on what one understands by the Kingdom of God. Christianity has **quite diverging views** on this concept. The opinion of our forebears did not coincide with the views prevailing in the Church. Therefore they left the Church and founded the Temple Society as an independent Christian community. They felt a commitment, based on the Gospel, to this interpretation of the **“Kingdom of God as a condition achievable on earth and therefore to be striven for.”** What they did was merely consistent with this interpretation, which they presented in complex theological arguments against the prevailing doctrine.

Many of us today who have grown up in this free community no longer know the views which the early Templers opposed and which

led them to undertake their step, as we are no longer familiar with the Church's ideas. When we happen to come across them, we can only wonder why deeply religious, educated and sincere people do not reject ideas we view as narrow-minded, and espouse the spiritual freedom which we, thanks to the achievements of our forebears, have possessed for generations.

The Temple Society teaches that the Kingdom of God is **the core of the Christian message** and that this kingdom is to be seen differently from the traditional view. It is surprising that any difference of opinion among Christians could arise from this question at all. The Gospels are available to us and their contents have been verified to a greater or lesser extent. From this source, it should be possible to deduce clearly and definitely **what Jesus meant** when he spoke of the Kingdom of God. And he certainly did speak of it, since it was the central concern of his work.

Everyone is clear *that* he spoke of God's kingdom. It is different though, when we ask *what* he said about it. For this we are forced to rely on second-hand reports, that is, on what others from their memory or from hearsay wrote down as his statements. Those written reports were in later years elucidated and interpreted by educated scribes and translators to make them more easily understood by the reader.

Our forebears undertook to propound their **own interpretation** of the concept. They declared that none of the four Gospel readings corresponded exactly with what Jesus himself had meant, substantiating their views with their critical Bible study, as well as their religious intuition. Jesus had meant a concrete **kingdom of better conditions on earth during people's lifetimes**, radiating from souls gripped by the idea and manifesting itself in the physical environment. It is therefore a **goal** requiring the highest human commitment. It is a goal that can be reached in the form of **Christian communities** following the Christian commandments of love of God and fellow men.

We are pleased to say that this interpretation made by our forebears can now, on the basis of modern exegesis, be considered to be the correct reading. It is **the interpretation** which the oldest testimonies about Jesus' words prove to be **the conviction that Jesus himself held**.

The evidence that Mark's Gospel is the oldest, and itself draws on three independent sources, can today be considered conclusive. One of these sources is most probably from amongst Peter's circle and is based on his personal experience and his own accounts. This source enables us to understand the concept of God's kingdom in its intended historical meaning, the one that matters to us, because it reflects Jesus' way of thinking.

Thus, Jesus meant by God's kingdom the **kingdom of those who believe in him**. This kingdom of believers is supported by the parables of the mustard seed that grows into a tree; the poor who shall be blessed; the net that catches good and bad fish; the first who shall be the last; the rich who find it hard to enter the kingdom; the leaving behind of all possessions; the persecutions; and the coming of the kingdom "with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26) which "the present generation will live to see". If this is a prophecy has it not been literally fulfilled?

God's kingdom is not a dogmatic concept; it is a **demand, a task, a goal** neither in the clouds nor in the next world, not only in the **innermost soul** but *also* in the world, **in human relations**. To have recognised and proclaimed this concept and to have striven for it, is to the lasting credit of the founders of our society; it is the legacy they left us, and it is our task to maintain and strengthen it. We can only fulfil this task together.

Dr Richard Hoffmann in *Bericht der Gebietsleitung der Tempelgesellschaft Australien über die Amtsführung im Jahr 1951/52* (TSA Annual Report of Regional Council 1951/52)  
Extract from the *Templer Handbook*

## God's kingdom – the central theme of the Christian Gospel

Jesus himself reintroduced the idea of God's kingship with a new meaning. He was **not patriotic** like the zealots, and he did not proclaim a national liberation program. He **rejected violence** towards the Romans as well as towards the Jewish authorities. **He did not preach of the judgment** and did not practise austerity and asceticism like the Baptist. He did share the apocalyptic expectations of his contemporaries, but he did not predict the timing of the events, because no one knew of that day or that hour but God alone.

He merely said that **God's kingdom was near at hand**: it was already present where life was conducted in God's way and would certainly still begin in the contemporary generation. Admittedly, man had to do something to be able to participate; he had to decide *for* God. This applied to each individual, to all people, communities and nations, for God's will was **salvation for all people**, all communities, all nations.

These were **glad tidings** for all "who are weary and whose load is heavy" (Matt. 11:28), for the poor, the underprivileged, the outcasts and the oppressed. All these are **not excluded** but they are **called upon to join**; nothing is required but a decision to accept God's reign of the world, a change of heart and trust in God.

This approach **explains** all his **statements** and it is against this background that they must be interpreted. It explains all his **actions and miracles**, in the performance of which his faith, and that of the others, played a decisive part. It explains his behaviour, which was provocative in the eyes of the Jews, in dealing with those people whom the pious Jew considered justly punished by God for their sins and therefore rejected: tax collectors, Samaritans, criminals, prostitutes, adulterers and outcasts, whom Jesus forgave their sins. It explains his relegation to second place of normal social responsibilities in family and community life; his transgression of laws if they prevented man from doing good; his forming of a circle of disciples from all classes of the population who immediately set aside their traditional ties, as Jesus had done, and followed him.

From his parables and individual statements it is evident that, for Jesus, God's kingdom was **the most important and worthy aim**, more important and worthy than anything else, whose secondary significance he did not deny at all.

This kingdom, said Jesus, is coming; **it has already begun**. God's cause **will take hold in the world**. This is the hope which he had and which he gave to the world; it is not derived from wishful thinking, but from his inner **conviction that this is God's will**.

History has superseded the **imminent expectation**, tied to a specific time, but has not made the **future expectation** invalid. If Jesus' cause is God's cause – something that can only be grasped through faith – then each respective present is always the time for a decision in the light of God's future.

The absolute future redirects man always to the present, in which he lives and works. God's kingdom must therefore not be seen as a "promise for later". Jesus did **not** wish to **teach about the end**, but to make an **appeal for the present** with a view to the end. On the other hand, one must not negate the future of God's kingdom by confining it to the present. We live in **this world**, but we have **hope for the future** and want to conduct our lives with the future in mind.

Dr Richard Hoffmann  
in *Die Warte des Tempels*, July/August 1977  
Extract from the *Templer Handbook*

## A State of Perfection?

The Kingdom of God is the **central concept in the faith of the Temple Society**, the only aspect to which we ask for our members' full commitment. However, it is a vastly **ambiguous concept**, and sometimes we feel uncomfortable using it. Perhaps this is because we are not quite certain what is meant by it; perhaps also because we are not sure whether we are entitled to use it. Is the meaning it has for us still the same meaning that it had for Jesus or even for Christoph Hoffmann? Are we still able to believe in God's kingdom at all?

Jesus compared God's kingdom with yeast. There can hardly be a better image. It gradually permeates the whole dough, which rises and grows. It barely changes its appearance, but in the end, each portion of it can become a new yeast that permeates a new dough.

In this light, a frequently asked question loses its significance: can we see an improvement in the relations amongst mankind so far; can we believe that there will be improvement in the future?

God's kingdom is not a perfect relationship of all men in a distant future, reached in a straight-line development. This is unimaginable. However, it is imaginable that **God's kingdom is everywhere**; we have the task here and now to let it manifest itself, as much as is possible, *within us* and *amongst us* in our earthly reality.

It does not matter that this is only **imperfectly** and **selectively** possible – each small achievement has its own intrinsic value and lasting impact. From time to time the lives of individuals and entire communities have succeeded, and can succeed in the future, in establishing God's kingdom **temporarily** in a purer form than is usually possible.

Dr Brigitte Hoffmann, from a service in Stuttgart, 17.9.1989  
Extract from the *Templer Handbook*

## Thinking of God's kingdom in a new way

When Jesus says *the Sabbath* – something his contemporaries understood as ordained by God – *was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*, this means that religious concepts should help humans to lead a better life. Where concepts do not, or no longer do that, we may and should interpret them anew. Here we also have a yardstick for what remains absolutely necessary: that which helps human beings live a better life.

So, to the Kingdom of God. I have noticed that, with Jesus, there is no description of the kingdom of God, as there still was with the prophets. All his many parables and sayings on the subject **focus on one thing: how God's kingdom can grow when people change their attitude** – so it is about a *dynamic process*. In that case, God's kingdom is not something that, sooner or later, according to God's will, suddenly begins. Nor is it something that – as Christoph Hoffmann probably believed – can be built up by human beings in a logical, consistent and linear way, but something that must grow anew, again and again and in many places, wherever people strive to make it happen.

This is certainly in keeping with our experience. There have been and are such efforts, not just by Christians, to make the world a bit more like God's kingdom, as much as we are able with our limited knowledge and capabilities, whether it be through establishing new communities or through efforts to make improvements within existing ones. We, too, in our communities want to be a place where a little of God's kingdom can grow. Whether we can do this better than others is not important. The **important** thing is that **we make the effort**, that we strive towards it and acknowledge that others are doing it in different ways.

The question remains why we use an **old term** that we always have to explain first. I observe that I often use it – **because there isn't another one as comprehensive**. Primarily it includes treating one another with love, but much else besides: beauty – in nature and

that created by human beings – which makes us happy; the infinite variety of phenomena in the natural and the human world; the striving for greater understanding. Also included is exercising patience about ourselves and others only ever being able to take small steps, and trusting that even these small steps are not in vain, that they will continue to have an effect even when, on the surface, they appear to have failed – trust in God.

Dr Brigitte Hoffmann

in a Reflection on the significance of our Templar motto,  
Matt. 6:33, in *Die Warte des Tempels*, April 2003

Translated by Herta Uhlherr

## Real and dynamic

As Templars we believe in the reality of the Kingdom of God. Its fulfilment we aim at and strive for. We share the awareness of a higher power that transcends our very being. That power we call God. In our view, the Kingdom of God is not a sacred reserve to be found exclusively in the middle of a desert, or in a majestic mountain retreat, or within the walls of a specific place of worship.

We see the Kingdom of God as a **dynamic state in which the great life force of love reigns supreme**. It shapes our destiny over the short span of our existence on this planet. The search for that kingdom and its fulfilment is inspired by faith. We need not search the heavens, or outer space, for a glimpse of that kingdom. It is within you and within me, and it is among us. It is not the privileged domain of any group of people. It belongs to all: young and old, rich and poor. It is not of this world in the worldly sense of the word, but it is destined for this world and certainly is a most vital force *in* this world.

We believe that the potential of this kingdom within us and among us can not be realised by standing around idly. **Inner peace, a sense of harmony, a feeling of belonging**, are not likely to drop in our lap from nowhere. These will **come to us when we open our inner doors to God** as the divine power permeating that kingdom.

For each one of us the Kingdom of God is a **state of mind**, a state of inner awareness, a **source of inspiration and of uplifting insights** far beyond the horizon of reason. To work towards the fulfilment of God's kingdom is to seek it in all sincerity, to embrace the wonder of its ways, and to follow the beckoning of the divine spark that can but bring out the best in us. The culmination of the fulfilment is to translate our inner gain into action in the crucible of daily life in this world. Only he who shares what he has gained can meaningfully help others in their earnest search.

As long as we live, that task of fulfilment remains a daily challenge. A challenge to re-affirm our commitment time and again, to deal with events in the spirit of our commitment according to the merits of the case in hand. Every person has to decide individually whether to take up and respond to the challenge as it arises time after time. Often it will not be an easy decision, and to follow it through can be far from comfortable and pleasant. But then, few worthwhile things have ever been achieved by just lounging in an armchair.

Life may be compared to a great marketplace offering countless possibilities of great variety. The temptation to make a quick buck, or to bolster the ego at the expense of someone else, is always there. Also there are the conventional openings for rewards in return for services rendered.

God calls us to service not for the purpose of earning our daily bread, but to make us realise the errors of some of our ways. It is never too late to change these ways and to come round to the recognition that man has within him a streak of the divine that enables him to inwardly sense far beyond the reach of his normal senses. There, in the realm of the divine, reward is seen in a new perspective. A perspective, where a good deed done as a voluntary service for someone in need, carries its own rich reward by way of peace of the heart and mind, and where quiet acknowledgement by an inner voice that rings true, is taken as more important than outward glittering honour and high-sounding titles.

In this perspective the fruits of the labour of love resemble the spreading rings of ripples caused on the surface of a pond by a falling twig. The twig stays put, but the ripples spread far and wide, and some may be reflected back to their source.

Dietrich Ruff, Temple Society President 1988-2001,  
from a remembrance service for Christoph Hoffmann,  
14.12.1986 in Bayswater

### **An inner and an outer state**

To strive and work for the establishment of God's kingdom here on earth is the aim of our religious society. By the Kingdom of God we mean, first of all, an **inner state**, a state of harmony and peace which we can attain by worshipping and trusting our Creator. But it is **also an outer state**. If we are harmonious and happy within ourselves, this will affect our environment as well, and by loving our neighbours as Jesus taught us we can improve conditions around us and help create a better world. Our goal is, of course, still far away. But we are not discouraged by this because we believe that it is the seeking and striving for it that really matters.

To be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God starts with the individual and the family. If you can believe that there is a Supreme Power we call God, if you can trust in his love and care (if you listen within and follow his guidance), if spiritual values mean more to you than material ones, all the rest will come to you as well, as Jesus said. Naturally, we shouldn't just sit back and wait for God to provide us with everything we need. We have to do our share of work, too. But from my own experience I can say that if you trust in the Almighty and surrender to him, you will find that all other things will fall into place – especially in the times of stress and sorrow we all have to experience sooner or later in life.

Eva Kortschak-Ruff, from a marriage address, 7.1.1989  
Extract from the *Templer Handbook*

# Mankind

## *From “Religious Perspective”*

*Through God's creative powers we are given a free will, albeit limited, and tendencies toward good and toward evil.*

*We are called to work on ourselves and the world of which we are part and for which we share responsibility.*

## Selected Excerpts

### Improvement through practice

**We believe that humanity has a duty.** Man is the only living being on this Earth that God has endowed with a spark of his spirit, which enables him to engage in creative activity and to look at himself objectively. By virtue of this divine spark, he is able to engage in conceptual thought, draw conclusions, and make decisions based on these conclusions, rather than on instinct or conditioning. However, the gift of this divine spark or spiritual capacity places him under an obligation to ensure that it does not wither away or is selfishly exploited, but develops in the direction of God's will. Since it is God's will that humans should feel happy, they must, individually and collectively, work with all their strength at realising such a state of happiness for humanity.

The practical application of this attitude of love can be condensed into two sentences: a **prohibition** for beginners and a **command** for the more advanced. The first says “What you do not want to be done to you, you must not do to others”, and the second says “in everything, behave towards others as you would like them to behave towards you”.

Since God has created man in such a way that all his talents – be they physical or spiritual – **require practice** to develop, we must be mindful of creating ways to further man's development by spurring on

his often sluggish spirit time and again and alerting him to the goal to be pursued: **becoming perfect in body and mind.**

Christian Rohrer  
*in Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

## **Can we change the world?**

“Set your mind on God’s kingdom” is our motto. Do we still believe in its achievement, the possibility of turning God’s kingdom on earth into a reality?

Perhaps we have to **change our way of thinking** a little, if today we still want to speak of God’s kingdom without self-deception. I will start with a point which I have frequently made before: **God has given man freedom.** This can be demonstrated – also to non-believers – by using the development of mankind as an example. However, it cannot be expressed more beautifully and meaningfully than in the biblical story of the fall of man: “You will be like gods, knowing both good and evil”. This step to the recognition of good and evil – and therefore the choice between the two – is what constitutes **man’s dignity, his likeness with God**, which, at the same time, causes the **loss of his paradisiacal innocence**, which he possessed only for as long as he had no freedom.

**Man can and must choose.** This means freedom, but it also means the ability to do evil. It also means that the choice to do good is not made once and for all and that no improvement is achieved once and for all. Because of the freedom that God has given us, the opportunity to choose evil is ever present.

We can try in a gradual and laborious manner to establish rules on how people should interact with mutual respect and consideration, how dams of law or social ostracism can be erected against the destructive elements that are within many, if not within all of us. However, these dams will never be secure. The greater our freedom from external

and internal restraints, the more devastating the breaches may be.

This means that for as long as human nature remains unchanged, there **cannot be a state of guaranteed harmony** amongst men. It will always be jeopardised and will probably only be possible in certain times and places.

Harmony is not the only criterion for a perfect world. A further element is our **striving to develop all our talents**, with all the contradictions this entails. Does this also include progress, which today is blamed for so many of our ills?

I would say yes – but also the awareness that progress is a double-edged sword, that it brings not only improvement but also new problems. Since we cannot imagine an ultimate state, a state of perfection, we have **no reliable yardstick** for what, in a development we cannot foresee, is good and what is not good.

Perhaps God's kingdom on earth cannot be a state of perfection, but **our striving for it must** continually be renewed and **never cease**.

Christoph Hoffmann demanded that our faith reach beyond our knowledge without contradicting our knowledge – a demand that is obvious to us all. Can we bring our *belief* in God's kingdom on earth into harmony with our *knowledge* of the evolution of mankind?

What we know and see is man's development leading to ever more diversity, more awareness, and more skills. This may be an aspect of perfection. However, this is not all, and it is not the perfection Jesus meant when he spoke of God's kingdom. His concern was a **new relationship between man and God** and that people **live together in greater harmony**. Is there a development in this direction, or – what is more important – can there be one at all, when all the experiences of history contradict this and when there are no firm guidelines as to which conditions are “better”, and “better” needs to be redefined again and again.

Well-known words of Jesus are “the Kingdom of God is within you”, or in an alternative translation of the same verse “the Kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21). This means that if you live as I have taught you, trusting God and loving your fellow man, then, the moment you have reached this state, God’s kingdom is there, within you, among you. It is a **spiritual experience** which we can share. Admittedly, we do not succeed in living like this all the time; often we allow ourselves to be overcome by anger or by indifference. However, when we do succeed, we can take a little of it out into the world.

Can we thereby change the world? A world that lives and must live by conflict? Not in the sense in which it is usually understood, namely that we can achieve a clearly perceptible, and possibly even lasting, improvement in each case. But perhaps we can in another sense. Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach once said: “One must do good, so that it exists in the world.”

This means in other words: There is a spiritual reality, in which **our actions and our intentions are of importance**, even if there are no visible consequences. This spiritual existence in which we share, and where our intentions and our striving are also real and create new realities, this, for me, is God’s kingdom.

“One must do good, so that it exists in the world”, because we can thereby add a little to the sum of the goodness, the power of God’s kingdom. For me, at least, that is a tremendously comforting thought. **It frees us from the disheartening feeling** that the little we can do is insignificant and in vain. It gives us **confidence** and our lives **meaning**.

Dr Brigitte Hoffmann, from a service in Stuttgart, 17.9.1989  
Extracts from the *Templer Handbook*

# The Bible

## *From “Religious Perspective”*

*The Bible contains the basic teaching of Christianity.*

*We recognise and respect biblical writings and regard them as a rich source that records human experiences with God.*

*We believe, however, that the books of the Bible were not "literally dictated" by God, and should therefore not be followed blindly.*

*In order to understand the true meaning of Jesus' teaching and its influence on subsequent religious developments, we consider it necessary to read these writings thoughtfully and without prejudice, and to apply to them the same critical standard as is usual for other historical works. Moreover, we must decide which of the traditional words and stories are tied to specific times, and which continue to be relevant for us; the criterion must be the essential guidelines taught by Jesus.*

## Selected Excerpts

### **Our conscience and reason influence our religious understanding**

The Bible is probably the most hotly disputed book in the world. This in itself is proof of its outstanding significance. But it is not the only – or the most important – source of our knowledge of God, as is often misguidedly believed. **Therefore it is just as large an error as it is a dangerous one to believe that merely being conversant with the wording of the Bible guarantees proper knowledge of God and his will.** Unfortunately, this error is widespread, and was so even at the time of Jesus, for he reproached his people by saying: “Have you not read the scriptures?” when in fact they could recite large parts of them by heart! His harsh judgment was a consequence of their behaviour, for if they had understood the spirit of the scriptures,

they would have recognised the will of God contained in them and their conscience would have compelled them to believe the words of Jesus and respect him, who had chosen to take this will of God as the guideline in his life.

How could it happen that they overlooked the most precious element of the scriptures? – **They allowed themselves to be satisfied with literalness and relied on the wording without investigating the meaning or spirit of the scriptures.** The leaders often did this for selfish reasons, the majority from mental inertia, the worst enemy of the human race. They were also conceited about their knowledge of the letter and, in their spiritual pride, considered themselves more pious than and hence superior to others, as illustrated in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. That is why mere memorisation of the Bible and clinging to the letter is completely against the spirit of the Temple Society.

**Understanding** the Bible properly, that is, to recognise what is of eternal value in it, **requires a source for the knowledge of God**, one that I would call the *primary*, the first and most important source, which rests within people themselves, and without which they are helpless in the face of all the other, *secondary* – or second-rate – sources. This source is **our conscience**, which supervises our **reason** and is served by it. (Conscience might also be termed religious awareness or religious intuition). This source wells in every human being, but must always be fed, lest it weaken or fade away completely. This is why the voice of conscience is not equally strong in all people; the more it is nurtured, that is, the more you practise listening to it, the louder and more clearly it raises its voice and helps you to gain the right insights. The more you utilise this source, the more successfully you will be able to use all the other sources.

The Bible seems to me the most important of these other, secondary sources. However, if it is to be of any use to us, we must approach it without prejudice.

The Bible is a book that has evolved gradually. It is a collection of writings across a time span of about 1500 years, counting from the oldest, the Song of Deborah, to the latest, the books of the New Testament; authors of great diversity contributed to its genesis. **To say that all the writings in this book are God's words exclusively is a more than arbitrary assertion**, for not only important insights about the will of God are to be found in these scripts but, amongst much else, also accounts of the history of Israel and other nations from the Creation of the World onwards until about 100 AD.

Christian Rohrer  
*in Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

### **Not *the* Word of God, but words of God**

If you ask me today, “how, then, is the Bible still the Word of God?” I reply: **The Bible is not the Word of God in the traditional sense, but I can find words of God in it** – enlightenment about the essence and the will of God and about the tasks given to the human race – of a quality and clarity I cannot find in any other book, even though much of what is good and worthy can also be found in books deemed holy in other cultures. The idea that man is called to be God-like, or the teaching of ‘the Kingdom of God’ is found in such clarity only in the Bible. It is these ideals which make the Bible precious to us, not what it says about historical events or nature, for the picture we have today of the world and of world events is and must be quite different from that of the Bible.

Christian Rohrer  
*in Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?*

### **Take the stories seriously, but not literally**

The Bible for us is no longer God's word – at least not in a literal sense in the way it was for our great-grandparents. The question we have to ask is whether it makes sense to continue to review and scrutinise the **stories of the New Testament** during Divine Service or in community seminars.

One of the essential elements of these stories is their complexity. Their meaning and message for us remains open. Thus they are *alive*, they are a piece of life. In life also we are not readily provided with meanings. The same experience can have a different meaning for different people. It is up to us to decide how we handle our experiences – and our stories. Thus, each good story is a *challenge*.

This particularly holds true for stories which are set in a religious tradition. Even if we no longer view them literally as God's revelation, they have by virtue of many generations having grappled with them, received *authority and weight* that remain, even though the literal belief may have waned.

What is important is our willingness to take them seriously, but not necessarily believe them word for word. In my experience, in the long run one gains more from the few things which one tackles again and again than from the many one only touches upon. Many of the 2000-year-old biblical stories contain so much wisdom that it is worthwhile reading, interpreting and scrutinising them again and again.

Almost all the stories deal with the **relationship between man and God**. At the same time, however, they also always describe **relations between humans**. For me this is more cogent “evidence of truth” than the alleged proof that a document originated by divine inspiration. What is told in the stories of the New Testament about the life and the statements of Jesus of Nazareth, what is reported about him and what he taught, is not just some doctrine that one believes or does not believe – they are things we can “verify” in our daily lives, that we can experience ourselves.

Dr Brigitte Hoffmann  
in *Die Warte des Tempels*, December 1984  
Also in the *Templer Handbook*

# Community

## *From “Religious Perspective”*

*Templers have always regarded the formation and cultivation of communities as essential, because Christianity can best be practised in communal life.*

*Although the task of working towards God’s kingdom relates to everything around us, it is most effectively accomplished in a community of like-minded people working cooperatively. We therefore ask our members to share in the community’s work and to take part in community life.*

## **Selected Excerpts**

### **Islands in a sea of secularity**

The smallness of our community should not discourage us. The decisive factor is not size, but rather the commitment with which we tackle our task. The German theologian Heinz Zahrnt prophesied in one of his books that, unlike in the past, religion would in future probably be sustained only on islands in the great sea of the secular world. Religion will no longer be the dominant influence in people’s lives. However, these “islands” will play important roles for humankind.

He believes that Christian faith grows when people live together in a community, sharing experiences and exchanging thoughts about, for instance, a Service they have just attended. In such a warm-hearted community of trustworthy companions, people, particularly young people, would be closer to how Jesus and his group of disciples experienced their lives.

I absolutely agree with that. I have been in this Templer Community for a very long time. It has become a home for me, without which I cannot imagine my life any more. I have felt that human beings need to be close to other people of goodwill, so as not to despair at life's vicissitudes. I am confident that, if we truly want it, we are always shown a way to go on.

**The small Templer communities are important islands in the great sea of secularity** – perhaps this image can help us towards new self-understanding. It does, however, also call us to keep improving our relationships with one another and to create the atmosphere of warmth and sincerity that every human being longs for. Let us understand that **our small numbers are in fact our strength**. And that, instead of lamenting the lack of new members, we would do better to raise our self-esteem and truly represent a spiritual temple in which every building block supports another and in which God's Spirit is at work.

Peter Lange, Temple Society President 2001-2007,  
in *Die Warte* and *Templer Record*, September 2002

Translated and condensed by Herta Uhlherr

## **A decade on, Australian-born Templers wrote as the Temple Society turned 150**

### **Home base for individual faith journeys**

The Templer Community is on a faith journey that started 150 years ago, when the first Templers strove to develop model communities and convince others by example to follow their lead. The philosophical and religious identity of the Temple Society will continue to evolve in tandem with the developing views of its members.

In our religious community, diversity flourishes and few statements of faith will resonate with all members at all times. This is because we who subscribe to the Templer way of thinking are encouraged to make up our own minds on matters of faith and the sacred – still

unusual today. Members are on individual faith journeys, with the Temple Society, as our religious home base, providing a supportive environment of people with a common aim based on Jesus' teachings of love of God, love of others and love of self.

The goal of the Templer Community is to support individuals in developing their inner strength, faith and philosophy of life along the lines that Jesus taught and so be the best that they can be. The hope is that members will take this approach into the many different areas of their lives and so help bring about the best possible world (what Jesus called the Kingdom of God on earth).

Jesus was one of various wise men to teach "love others as you love yourself". Following his challenging example of selfless love is a little easier if you are supported by a community of people with a similar aim, purpose and values. This like-mindedness fosters a sense of togetherness, of belonging.

Our community provides a safe and supportive place for individuals to interact with each other. There are opportunities to learn from one another and to practise living and working together harmoniously.

Our communal life takes place at our community centres through religious services and discussions, as well as at youth activities (like family camps, playgroup), aged care, welfare work, working bees, focus and interest groups, special social and cultural or heritage events and so on. Through these activities, members and friends develop familiarity with each other and try to accept individual differences. There is a place for various levels of participation, and members are encouraged to join in and to contribute as best they can.

Communication tools like the *Templer Record* in Australia, *Die Warte des Tempels* in Germany, Templer websites and online social networks also provide connection around the globe.

Compiled from various 2011 contributions of  
Elders Renate Beilharz and Renate Weber

# 4.

## How we see ourselves

### *From “Religious Perspective”*

*Our aim is to work toward balanced development, in harmony with our environment, thereby enhancing the quality of life and contributing toward the growth of the kingdom of God in the world.*

*We do not require of our members an obligatory profession of beliefs. What is important is the willingness to affirm our aim and participate in working towards it in daily life .*

*We acknowledge that such work is also the goal of other Christian denominations, though possibly with a different priority. It is also the goal of other religions, even if under different names and assumptions. Whether some of these ways are better than others is not for us to judge.*

*Accordingly, we permit dual membership with respect to other Christian denominations as well as other religions, if the individual's conscience allows this.*

*We regard personal responsibility and integrity of the individual in religion as indispensable. That is why one becomes a full member of the Temple Society by one's own declaration of intent.*

*We use rituals whose purpose is to lend depth to a religious service. However, we do not believe that rituals have an intrinsic value of their own, and we reject rituals of a sacramental nature which are claimed to bestow salvation, e.g. baptism.*

*So we have no consecrated places for our divine services, no ordained priests and no full-time clergy. The religious leadership and guidance of each community is in the hands of several Elders from within the community.*

# Selected Excerpts

## Our name and purpose

It is important for us Templers from time to time to reflect on the name our Society bears and on what we mean by this name. Is the picture of the **temple still a living image**? Do we know what was originally meant by it? Is the core concept of the Temple still viable in the future, or does it no longer serve?

In the last decades, and recently in Australia, there have been discussions about whether we should use a different name so as to be better understood by our young people and by the wider community; perhaps also so as not to be confused so often with the Knights Templar. I wonder: if our next generation and the people around us do not understand our name, then is it not up to us to explain its meaning more clearly? To speak plainly: in my estimation, a name change would be of no benefit at all; on the contrary, it would more likely mean a loss of identity.

But let us start by looking at the origin of our name. The term is taken from a passage of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christian community at Ephesus in Asia Minor. Here he calls out to the newly converted community members from the Hellenistic region:

*You people from other regions are no longer strangers or foreign visitors, but also part of the structure built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Jesus Christ himself. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a holy temple of the Lord. In him you too [like building blocks] are being built together to become a spiritual dwelling for God.*

*Eph 2:19-22.*

In my view, this image is extraordinarily vivid and easy to remember. Here the community of Jesus' followers is perceived as a structure, as a temple, and the community members as the building blocks forming it.

Of course, we have to keep in mind that for the Apostle Paul and the people of that time the Temple in Jerusalem was a well-known structure and that its meaning was abundantly clear to everyone. This temple was the holiest place for all Jews everywhere. In it God was encountered. From it God's blessing radiated out to the people. And now this man Paul was saying that, likewise, every community founded on the teaching of Jesus was a temple, because, he said, **the criterion for a temple was God's Spirit**. Wherever this spirit ruled on earth, wherever it took hold of people's hearts and motivated them to stick together and to cooperate effectively, there a temple came into being, a temple made up of human building blocks.

I ask you: is this image not powerfully expressive enough? Should we not consider it a goal worth pursuing to pool our resources and build a community, a temple, in which God's Spirit dwells and can be felt? For the early Templers at least, this was worth pursuing to the extent that they dedicated their lives to this goal alone and gave up everything that could keep them from it. Their strong will helped them surmount every difficulty, every setback and opposition. This willingness to work together on building the temple was what our founding fathers saw as the most important prerequisite for being a member of the community. Christoph Hoffmann allowed his followers much freedom in the individual expression of their faith. Through him we became independent or free Christians without imposed creeds and dogmas.

However, the will to help build the temple is no longer nearly as strong. Many among our ranks have turned away from the task. Templer Communities did not achieve the widespread influence the founders once hoped they would. New priorities dominate the lives of modern-day people – not just of the Templers! Life has become more materialistic and no longer takes its bearings only from spiritual values. So does the Temple Society still have a future? Is anyone still interested in the ideals that once animated our forebears?

Undeniably, many of today's younger people are searching for a sense of belonging, for warmth and security. They worry about whether there will still be a world worth living in tomorrow. In the face of so much that is pointless in their lives, they yearn for meaning and fulfilment.

I am convinced in the core of my being that our Templer faith can provide an answer to questions about whether life has meaning. What we traditionally call "seeking the Kingdom of God" is the belief that **we are called to become higher human beings by continuing to work on our physical, mental and spiritual development** and so growing more peaceful, loving, tolerant and just. "Seeking the Kingdom of God" also includes the **belief that this positive development is possible** – that humanity in fact has the capacity for transformation. Jesus of Nazareth furnished us with the guidelines for how individuals should act to achieve this goal. Will we not place our trust in his teaching?

I am convinced that our faith is not superseded – it is as relevant as it ever was. **We have inherited something of great value** from our fathers and we must not allow this spiritual treasure to get lost. Let us use this inheritance – principles for living with compassion and integrity, networks of people we like and trust, community centres – to spread this message among ourselves and for the benefit of many others.

Peter Lange, in *Islands in the Sea of Secularity*,  
*Die Warte* and *Templer Record*, September 2002

Translated and condensed by Herta Uhlherr

## **Establishing and maintaining a progressive Christian community in Australia**

*Why the way we live is more important than what we believe* is the sub-heading of Gretta Vosper's book *With or without God* (2008) about how to implement change within a church community. The Temple Society is a living example of a community where considerable change from mainstream Christian Church practices occurred at its establishment 150 years ago; since then it has been constantly challenged to continue growing and developing to meet the religious and spiritual needs of its members and society as a whole. Many of the challenges outlined by Vosper are still apparent for the Temple Society today, since being "progressive" is about openness, thinking, questioning, moving, always evolving and responding to the changing needs and expectations as they arise, without compromising one's identity and purpose.

The Temple Society is a spiritually diverse community, which focusses on Christian values serving as a life guide in how we conduct ourselves and interact with others. Our focus and reason for being is our sense of community, and we take great pride in what we are able to achieve as an effective community model. Our members – having freedom of belief and religious thought – endeavour to practise, individually and collectively, an active values-based philosophy centred on trust, fairness and respect. The Temple Society has a statement of identity and faith, *Religious Perspective* published in 2000, which is intended to serve as a frame of reference and guide for members and the wider community on topics such as Jesus, God, the Bible and Community life.

These characteristics of the faith of the Temple Society incorporate practical aspects of consolidating and sustaining a progressive Christian faith community in Australia by:

- Offering religious gatherings with no set liturgy, ritual or sacraments balancing the need for food to nurture the mind and the soul

- Balancing tradition and innovation – keeping members of the community engaged
- Responding to being called a ‘Clayton’s religion’: the religion you have when you don’t have a religion
- Arguing for the right to be called Christian, despite not teaching the trinity and the divinity of Jesus
- Offering Sunday school, Confirmation classes and discussion forums in a progressive Christian community setting
- Creating a ‘Statement of faith’ when there is no tradition of creeds and dogmas
- Standing strong and proud as a small player in the general Christian community, which is dominated by large, powerful organisations with the benefits of tradition and a well known image.

Many churchgoers and congregations associated with the progressive Christian movement in Australia have undergone, or are undergoing change, investigating alternative practices and ways to understand their faith. The founding generation of the Temple Society deliberately underwent this change in 1861, dispensing with all ritualistic and doctrinal elements, focussing instead on what they saw as the central focus and essence of Jesus’ teachings.

And, for 60 years in this country, the Temple Society Australia has been striving to actively demonstrate and practise a liberal, progressive Christianity, while maintaining strong community and social cohesion, without the safety net of a prescribed core set of beliefs or a hierarchical church structure. This has been, and still is, a challenging journey for the Temple Society, in an Australian community where religion and faith compete with many other priorities.

We would like to share our experiences with the wider Progressive Christian Network membership, in the hope that this will assist others in their endeavours to promote Christian thought and practice,

particularly those interested in how to establish and maintain a progressive Christian community in Australia.

Renate Beilharz  
from a proposal to the Progressive Christian Network  
of Victoria explaining the Temple Society, 2011

## **How Australian-born Templers see our Community**

The Temple Society faith philosophy allows each individual to see, experience and develop, in their own way, a relationship with God, the Life-force, Higher Power or Ultimate Reality, however they understand this. This freedom of religious thought allows the development of individuality and diversity amongst members, who are, however, united in having the same aim.

The Temple Society is creed and dogma free, so we cannot make a statement such as ‘to be a Templer you must ...’ or ‘a Templer is ...’ or ‘all Templers believe ...’. Therefore, how the Temple Society itself is perceived by its individual members is also very varied.

When making a conscious decision to become a member of the Temple Society after turning 18, a person agrees with its aim and endeavours and to participate in the communal life as much as the member can “conveniently do”.

With this freedom of thought and expression comes responsibility, as individuals and as a community. It is a challenge to be responsible for your own thoughts while valuing and respecting the views of others. This is what makes the Temple Society special to its members. We do not see ourselves as better than other faith communities; we accept that there are various paths for individuals to seek their God or the spiritual. Templer thinking encourages this and provides a path that allows for individual differences.

We [the authors] feel blessed to have grown up in a religious community where this freedom is encouraged and supported. We

feel a strong bond with other members of our community, sharing a religious outlook with the same values and aim. Our heritage is an integral part of *who we are*, providing the foundation for our communal and religious activities.

We are very aware that, because of our German heritage, there was always a danger of being or becoming insular. In Australia, our common language is English, making our community more accessible to all. Our official use of the German language has decreased, since most of us now are bi-lingual or speak only English. However, we maintain links with our heritage and our sister community in Germany by offering German language classes and certain cultural traditions. We are proud of our Templar history; it adds a richness and depth to our lives.

In the 21st century, Templars are aiming towards increasing awareness of the Temple Society in the wider community. We are working on making ourselves more open and accessible by being involved in local communities, inter-faith and international forums.

Personally, we see the Temple Society as an essential part of our lives; however, we have many other sides to our busy lives, including work, family, school, clubs and participation in the activities of the wider community. Being a Templar influences how we interact with people in different environments because we take our values with us. The religious dialogue offered within the Temple Society provides us with the personal strength to strive to live a full life in a positive and constructive way. This enables us to offer support to our friends, family and acquaintances in times of need. We also receive support and encouragement from individual interaction with other Templars. We believe that Templar thinking, practised in daily life, benefits us and the world, and we are therefore committed to participating in the Temple Society.

Elders Renate Weber and Renate Beilharz, 2011  
Also in the TS 150 Jubilee Edition of the TR

# 5.

## References

### **Temple Society – Religious Perspective**

Joint Statement of TSA and TGD, compiled by Dietrich Ruff

Published by TSA, 2000

### **Templer Handbook**

English translation of *Templer Handbuch*, compiled by Peter Lange, 1992

Published by TSA, 1995

### **Is the Bible the Source of our Knowledge of God?**

English translation of *Ist die Bibel die Quelle der Gotteserkenntnis?*,

Christian Rohrer, 1935

First published 2008 as a *Templer Record* supplement,

re-published as a paperback 2010, by TSA

### **Templer Record – TS150 Jubilee Edition**

Published by TSA, 2011

### **Various other publications**

*Warte des Tempels* – German

*Templer Record* – English

Religious services in English and German

# Further Reading

## **Origins of the Temple Society**

English translation of *Wie es zum Tempel kam*, Seminar series

(Stuttgart), 2003

Published by TSA, 2004

## **The Temple Society – An Overview**

Compiled by Dietrich Ruff

Published by TSA, 1986

## **The Holy Land Called**

English translation of *Uns rief das Heilige Land*, Paul Sauer, 1985

Published by TSA, 1991

## **The Temple Society and its Settlements in the Holy Land**

English translation of *Occident und Orient* (Part 1),

Christoph Hoffmann, 1875

Published by TSA, 1996

## **Memories of Palestine**

Narratives about life in the Templar communities (1869-1948)

English translation of *Damals in Palästina*, 1990

Published by TSA, 2005

# 6.

## Further Reading

### **Publications in German**

Refer to the list in the Templer Handbook

*Meine Erfahrungen mit der Bibel*, Brigitte Hoffmann

Compiled by Peter Lange, 2001

*Mein Verständnis von Jesus*, Brigitte Hoffmann

Compiled by Peter Lange, 2006

*Meine Gedanken zum Gottesreich*, Brigitte Hoffmann

Compiled by Peter Lange, 2011

# Authors

## Beilharz, Renate

Establishing and maintaining a progressive Christian community in Australia.....	42
--	----

## Beilharz, Renate and Weber, Renate

Home base for individual faith journeys.....	36
How Australian-born Templers see our Community.....	44

## Hoffmann, Dr Brigitte

A State of Perfection?.....	22
Attempts to describe what we cannot comprehend.....	6
Can we change the world?.....	28
Jesus as the Yardstick.....	11
Take the stories seriously, but not literally.....	33
Thinking of God's kingdom in a new way.....	23

## Hoffmann, Dr Richard

God's kingdom – the central theme of the Christian Gospel.....	20
The Mystery of Jesus.....	11
The Resurrection – how we understand it.....	12
What did Jesus mean by the Kingdom of God?.....	17

## Kortschak-Ruff, Eva

An inner and an outer state.....	26
----------------------------------	----

## Lange, Peter

Islands in a sea of secularity.....	35
Our name and purpose.....	39

# 7.

## Authors

### Rohrer, Christian

Improvement through practice.....	27
Jesus of Nazareth's Perception of God.....	3
Jesus's main message.....	10
Not <i>the</i> Word of God, but words of God.....	33
Our conscience and reason influence our religious understanding.....	31
The Temple Society's Perception of God.....	2

### Ruff, Dietrich

Real and dynamic.....	24
-----------------------	----

### Weber, Renate and Beilharz, Renate

Home base for individual faith journeys.....	36
How Australian-born Templers see our Community.....	44

### Weller, Dr Alfred

The Song of Praise to Love.....	16
---------------------------------	----



ISBN 978-0-9577837-4-4