

The Michaelic Human Being

An Interview with Sven Åke Lorentson
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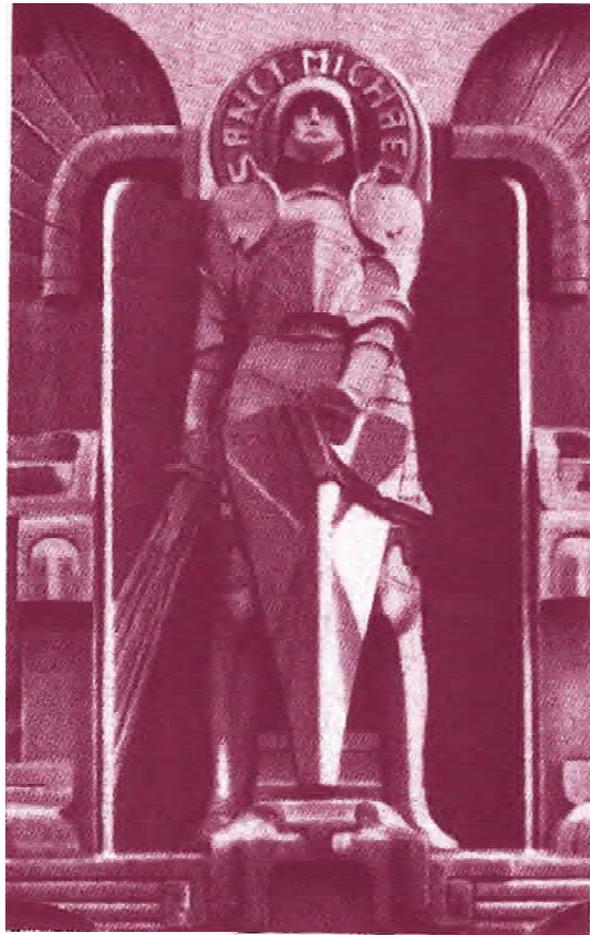
Translated by Anniken Mitchell

Q: Why do we celebrate St. Michael in the Waldorf school, or the nodal points of the year at all? What does Michael represent for the children and for us adults and for the world? These questions led us to someone who could answer more than many a priest could ask!

A: Why these celebrations in Waldorf schools? “Which month is the darkest?” some adults ask. Many people will actually answer November rather than December because for them it is a reality, a concrete experience—the Christmas mood brings forth an inner light.

So on the emotional level we experience an inner course to each year—we could call it the mystery year. In order to understand the mystery year it is important to take into consideration the experience we had as children. For many this is forgotten or suppressed. For Norwegians, Easter is often connected with traveling to the mountains. As a Swede I have to ask which mountain is it that has such a magical quality. In Sweden we have the midsummer night’s eve, which has its own ritual, and for Norwegians it is Easter time in the mountains.

In earlier times we had traditionally a sense for an inner course of the year in our culture. We celebrated and received a real relationship, each one of us. Gradually this has decreased. Just as with puberty in the young person’s life, the Lutheran impulse in the North European spiritual life brought a break with this more instinctual connection and brought a new sense of freedom, in itself the foundation for atheism and a sense of disconnection or alienation. The inner course of the year can give us a renewed connection to the world. With different values than those that speak to the ego, a real experience is created in this relationship, and it is different than belief. In the Steiner/Waldorf schools we have emphasized to strengthen this anchoring from early age. The little child is by nature religious. The experience of the celebrations of the festivals is natural up to puberty. After puberty we have to ourselves establish our own relationship to the religions, and this is also the goal of the schools—to practice the independent, seeking human being, not the human being steeped in belief.



Q: So it seems important to have a constant forming of the rituals so they are not just repeating old beliefs?

A: All religions have to do with repetition, with practice. But in the artistic there is also a repetition which is connected with the religious deeds. The creative is a process. In order to then experience what has been created, it is the archetypal picture: God created the world, and on the seventh day, when he rested, he saw that it was good. In this way the artistic practice also contains insight and knowledge. The intellectual process goes in the opposite way: from question to awareness to insight. This can also be the road towards a religious experience if you go in depth. When we talk about the rituals in the school, it is important to have courage to explore what truly is contained in the sacred celebrations. And it is important with new creations. Here a lot of exciting events have taken place around the celebration of Michaelmas, both within the Waldorf school and slowly also within the church.

Q: Does Michael kill the dragon?

A: A good picture of this is of Michael holding down the dragon under his feet, or holding it at bay. The evil forces are not just outside ourselves, but also within ourselves. The medieval mystic said, “The human being is like the crow: both white and black, not mixed.” So we have to acknowledge the evil forces and hold them at bay. A precondition for forgiveness is to see that another human being is in a circumstance where he or she does not have the forces and strength to hold these dragon forces at bay. But the strength to manage this is attainable for the human being. It is possible through self-knowledge and through entering a healthy social process to develop these capacities. And this is what is characteristic for the Michaelic human being.



Michael subduing but not killing the dragon

Q: In this way Michaelmas is really part of a social and personal developmental process.

A: Yes, in the Steiner schools social process is always important, and a healthy self-development requires a healthy image of the human being. In this way the celebrations of the year are important in order to understand the world in which we live and in order to understand who we are, that we come from a certain place, and are headed for a certain destination. The Christmas celebration shows a certain opening: the birth of a child. The heavens are there and the angels. Easter shows us that death, which is an absolute necessity, is not a total and final ending, but also has the forces of transformation within it. With Saint John's celebration in the pre-Christian times through the ecstatic element shows that the human being's inner experience belongs to the spiritual worlds. In the Christian celebration of this time of year, it is possible to experience that through self-knowledge, we can wake up to an awareness of the spirit. The Michael message tells us that it is we human beings who have to participate in the future of humankind and the earth, that we can rely on the good forces within the human being, and that these good forces can overcome our evil tendencies.

Q: In this way we can talk about the Michaelic impulse in world evolution.

A: In our time we can see, above everything else, the individual human being's capacity for freedom. We are continually presented with new problems, which we have to make decisions about and develop a stance in relationship to ourselves. Because there are no longer any hard and fast moral rules or clear ethical guidelines that can help us, the impulses for right deeds have to be brought out from within ourselves: What we in the moment can see and feel as right and true. We can definitely observe a growing will-impulse in our time to take responsibility for our earth's life and future and to be able to see wholeness. We can see that the earth is a closed system with limited resources, and many people are starting to feel that these resources have to be shared equally. There are great expectations resting on the human being and a large responsibility.

All of these are characteristics of the Michaelic time. Michael can only help when the human being, out of his or her own will impulse and insight, takes action. The phenomenon of the "civil society" is an expression of the Michaelic through the challenges he asks of us. When people wake up and act out from their own moral and ethical impulses, then also a renewed impulse for democracy will grow in the world, which will live its own independent life between the life of commerce (with all its impulses towards greed) and the political life (with its impulse towards power structures). It is only a strong civil society that can get the political life to listen more intently to the value-imbued human motivations rather than the pure egotistical motivations which seem to dominate our business life today. Paradoxically enough, we can see that the new tools for this world commerce, the Internet and mobile telephones for instance, can become tools also for the spirit of Michael, and perhaps can help make more accessible a true democratic communication.