

## Ormond St John Edwards

8<sup>th</sup> October, 1928 – 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2009

Ormond St John Edwards was born in Widnes in Cheshire. His father was a printer. Before her marriage, his mother had been secretary in London to Dr Down, son of the well-known Dr Langdon Down, who had identified Down's Syndrome. In Widnes she became a magistrate at a very early age through her involvement in the social issues of the town, which included the care of young people with various difficulties. Ormond with his two sisters and brother got to know some of these young people too.

After the war the family moved to Shrewsbury where Ormond attended the great Shrewsbury School, whose alumni include Charles Darwin, Sir Martin Reese, the Astronomer Royal, as well as original spirits such as Richard Ingrams and Michael Palin. On returning to Shrewsbury after a period of National Service in Egypt, he attended Shrewsbury Technical College for a year. Through a talk about Goethe given by George Trevelyan by invitation of the students, Ormond was encouraged to read Rudolf Steiner. About this time through quite different contacts he came to hear of The Christian Community and began attending events in Albrighton Hall, Shropshire, then the conference centre of The Christian Community in the UK. Ormond attended the large youth conference held in Engelberg near Murrhardt in 1950 that marked the opening of the church in the Werfmershalde, Stuttgart at

which he had the first of three significant meetings with Emil Bock.

He was part of one of the earliest groups of students in the newly founded Keele University, and often told stories about the ideals of its foundation as a departure in the British university scene, consciously trying to bridge the divide between the Arts and the Sciences. He graduated with Honours in Economics and Geography, with subsidiary subjects of Statistics, Geology and German. It is important to record Ormond's educational background, because one striking thing about him was his refusal to make any separation between his chosen vocation as a priest of The Christian Community and the wider world of learning and scholarship.

After graduation he worked for his father for a year, gaining considerable knowledge of the processes of typesetting, printing and binding books. His interest in every aspect of printing, particularly the character of the typefaces, never left him. He took a post for a further year teaching in the Steiner School in Ilkeston. Inspired now by what he had met in The Christian Community, he collected everything necessary to hold a service in the school, only to learn no service could be held, because there was no priest available to come. This gave Ormond his first motivation to find out what might be involved in such a vocation, and he resolved to attend the training course in Stuttgart. He



now moved to London to find work that could contribute to the training costs and to get to know the congregations. During that time he briefly met another candidate, Irene Taylor, who happened also to be planning to attend the same course in Stuttgart.

After Ordination in 1960, Ormond worked with Evelyn Capel in Temple Lodge for two years before being sent to Kings Langley. He and Irene married in 1963. After Alfred Heidenreich's death in 1969, Ormond joined Irene in North London. It was in this time that he acquired a second hand printing press and started publishing. He registered the enterprise as Floris Books, after Joachim of Floris. The first book was his own *A New Chronology of the Gospels*. He jokingly said that it

was probably the only book ever to have been written, edited, printed, bound and read by one and the same person. Soon, with great labour, he started producing other books, until eventually Christian Maclean came to the rescue and put the venture on a professional footing.

The theme of the first book was the major preoccupation of Ormond's mature years: the chronology of the New Testament. In a number of letters and articles to scholarly journals, which led to his being asked in 1983 to referee an article in *Nature* on 'Dating the Crucifixion', he developed these themes, which found a mature presentation in the book *The Time of Christ* (Floris Books, 1986). Ormond was undeterred by the seas of information that

had to be worked through and understood, and the whole areas of study that his researches took him into, from cuneiform inscriptions to the coins of the Roman Republic; from the Babylonian lunar calendar to the textual traditions underlying our New Testament. It was all grist to the mill. The underlying concern was to grasp the reality of the Incarnation, the mystery of how a spiritual reality becomes historical fact.

Ormond was delighted when the recognition brought by his publications led to him finding new colleagues in his researches, particularly Professor Colin Humphreys and Dr Graeme Waddington. When I was studying for a Bachelor of Divinity in Aberdeen in the 90s, with Ormond's encouragement and support, we

were told in a class on the New Testament that the world authority on the chronology of the NT was living in Aberdeen. The class was taken by Professor Howard Marshall, himself a renowned scholar of the Gospel of St Luke. When I told Ormond, he recalled a pleasant conversation that he had had with the professor. With all his kindly recognition of Howard Marshall, he could not quite disguise his disappointment that this well-known scholar had had far less to say about this area of the background of the New Testament than Ormond himself.

Ormond and Irene were sent to Aberdeen in 1977. Ormond was always glad to work alongside someone with clear ideas about forming the community life. He was loved as a pastor and speaker. One achievement of those years that bears his mark, aside from the scholarly work that continued uninterrupted, was the work he put into bringing about a new phase of the relations between The Christian Community and the Camphill communities around Aberdeen, through better understanding of each others' roles and tasks.

In 1992, after completing a beautiful renovation of the chapel in the town-house near the centre of Aberdeen, dry rot was discovered. This seeming disaster, however, turned to the good when it emerged that a local company wanted to buy the house in order to convert it into offices. The eventual sale of the house made possible the building of the present Christian Community church on a disused plot of land only a few streets away. This opened up a new phase of congregational life, which Ormond led and then supported in varying degrees of 'retirement' over the next seventeen years.

In the Aberdeen years another interest joined the interest in chronology, which was evolution. Ormond read and understood a huge variety of books on topics ranging from palaeontology via embryology to the latest theories of neuroscience. Here the central concern was to investigate, behind Darwinian evolution, the more hidden stream of evolution of which T. H. Huxley, in spite of his unreserved acclaim for Darwin, said: human evolution proceeds in the opposite direction to what prevails in nature and the struggle for existence. Ormond found this view gradually gaining ground until he saw that Stephen J Gould, among others, (in 1977, in *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*) was able to show that the most important determinant of human evolution is neotony: the human being evolves by retaining the *juvenile* characteristics of our ancestors.

As Ormond had already shown in *The Time of Christ* through his gospel and historical research that the chronology of the last 'three years' of the life of Christ unfolded in stages in accord with the rhythms of the incarnating human being during the pre-natal phase of life, he now felt it should be possible to extend this knowledge into childhood.

In the last ten years this interest in the child which had grown up along with and parallel to the chronology and evolution became the central focus of Ormond's attention. He purchased a whole new shelf of books by modern writers on child development to investigate what the experts had to say about the growing phases of childhood and their manifestation in standing/walking, speaking and consciousness. He felt that the stages of (hominid) evolution on the one hand, and

the phases of development of the child on the other are paralleled in the Incarnation in ways that await wider discovery.

Ormond loved to support and enable others. His smile revealed his keen mind, which could assess human situations shrewdly and accurately. Nevertheless, his basic gesture was one of support and appreciation of others' achievements. He had his own yardstick for assessing his own achievements, and was not too perturbed by others' judgements. With all his independence of mind he was deeply loyal to The Christian Community and utterly convinced of its place in contemporary cultural life. His legacy can be read in his books and articles; it is there in the many people he helped and encouraged; he contributed too to the solidity of the ground on which we stand in our movement.

TOM RAVETZ

### Ormond Edwards—Friend and Colleague

Ormond summed up the main thrust of his theological work in his book, *The Time of Christ*. In it he shows an extraordinary grasp of the complex interrelationships of the various calendars in use at the time of the Incarnation. They are systematically sorted out and harmonized, allowing a pattern to emerge in which can be seen the basis for a threefold development, a threefold penetration and transformation by the Christ of the human soul, life and bodily constitution, which prefigures and makes possible the future evolution and transformation of the whole human being. It is an evolution motivated by a future goal, set forth in the completion of Christ's incarnation on earth. This basic thought is central to Christian teaching.

Ormond's work on harmonizing the calendars used at the time (each reference to a time in the Bible has to be allocated to a particular calendar) provides a clear pattern for the stages of the Incarnation, to be understood as an evolutionary process.

If Charles Darwin, Shrewsbury School's most notable scholar, put forward evolution as the origin of where we are today, implying that the overall impetus of human life is determined by natural selection, then Ormond's contribution, as a latter day Shrewsbury School scholar, in working on the 'time factor' in human development and in the Incarnation, should be recognized as an important corrective which needs an interpretation in a new dimension and is set forth in the Incarnation of Christ and in particular in its fulfilment in the Resurrection.

Of course, Ormond's basic task was as a priest, carried out in the congregations to which he was appointed, which was much appreciated by members and colleagues alike. His was a unique presence in our circle of priests who could always be relied upon for help and encouragement. He took a particular interest in the structure of The Christian Community, such as its legal and administrative arrangements. While his mind was well adapted to the detailed intricacies of these spheres, he could on occasion make things more complicated than was evident to others. But he invariably had a point to make. This provided a useful check, ensuring that everyone had a clear picture of what was actually being put forward. When contributing, he often appeared to be working out the points he wished to make, in a kind of thinking aloud. Nevertheless, whatever was under discussion, you could

feel his intense participation, as he sat in his chair, leaning slightly forward, hands in movement, engrossed in shaping the thoughts he wished to express, choosing his words carefully.

In lighter, more informal, moments he could recount amusing stories of actual incidents (I cannot recall him telling jokes). Again here, hands would follow the content, sometimes with the gesture of disbelief and accompanied by an obvious sense of incredulity. The voice would follow suit amid a not so subdued chuckle.

Ormond was, in addition to the scope of his theological and congregational work, an outdoor man. I knew him as part of the regular pool of colleagues who ran our summer youth camps in the 1960's on the Welsh coast near Harlech. He would arrive on his trusted motor bike and immediately get to work setting up camp. He was entirely at home with the young folk, and with the sea and the fairly wild hinterland which offered wonderful walking opportunities which he greatly appreciated. In fact, on one occasion he persuaded us to undertake a two day trek out of camp into the hills. It was a memorable occasion. Unforgettable for me was the overnight in a very primitive stone barn in the middle of nowhere to which he led us. Not only were walls and roof stone, the ground on which we had to doss down was also basi-

cally covered with rough stones. Whilst this was perfectly acceptable for such folk as Ormond who enjoyed a good night's sleep, for some it was a real challenge, if not a 'trial', which perhaps later, as in my case, could be remembered as a significant moment of the overall camp experience. The camps were enjoyed by many. Even today, I occasionally meet one or the other of those young folk who tell me, forty to fifty years on, how much they appreciated them.

So you could say that Ormond was a great all-rounder. He was a good loyal friend who served our cause so well in, what one perhaps can say, his own wonderfully self-effacing way.

MICHAEL TAPP

## *Stag*

*Then lights were lighted  
along the stag's antlers  
like holly and its clusters of berries,  
grouped like grapes great and small or  
the close-held cones along larch branches.*

*And a glow  
came from the stag's brow  
and long nose.*

*And he  
paused  
in the forest.*

*Then turned away  
into the darkness  
like the hero  
of humankind  
going off  
to war.*

IAIN  
CRANFORD HUNTER