

We live in a rural community but the ‘newcomers’ among us are not really part of it. It’s a world and mentality which has carried on for generations, working the land and looking at the land quite differently from us. We could be and, indeed, are, most of the time, in a different world – or are we? Just occasionally I get to engage with this other world and it can be a useful reminder of just how confined I am within my own world. This is a short extract from a recent conversation with a farmer and his son wondering what I was up to, in a remote part of Bedfordshire at a very early hour of the morning, with my binoculars and notebook in hand, as I was wondering what they were up to as well. It went something like this:

*Where are all the swallows, then? We used to have four pairs in our barn and we haven’t got them now and the barn’s just the same.*

*There’s not enough insects for them.*

*There’s plenty of insects on my cattle (turning to his son for confirmation).*

*When was the last time you cleaned your windscreen of insects?*

*Fair enough. But it’s not insecticides. We’re not allowed to use the ones that caused all the trouble before. It’s people in North Africa. They’re netting the swallows to eat.*

*Well, perhaps – and, of course, Africa is changing. Deforestation and so on. It’s not such a good home for swallows any more*

*Home? This is their home. They nest here.*

*But they spend almost as much time in Africa.*

*Whose swallows are they then?*

What a good question! *Whose swallows are they then?* We went on to other things: tree planting; black grass; how much money the Roman Catholic Church has, and so on. But it got me thinking about our own true home with two images in mind: this constant flitting we all do between the two worlds we imagine, most of the time, are separate: the spiritual and the material; and how trapped we are within one way of thinking, in a world, inevitably, of diminishing returns where the insects are getting fewer all the time. Whose swallows are we? Where is our true home? And I thought of the Spirit which doesn’t separate us from the world, take us out of it, but enables us to live in it as what it truly is, God’s world, after all; created by God, affirmed as good by God, for us to live in, in a Godly way; taken up into the life of God, not at some future distant date, but in the here and now of everyday living. So we’re not flitting between heaven and earth, as if one world were more real than the other. No – the Spirit is bringing us into the one world of Trinitarian life; into the same movement which takes place within the Trinity, and indeed, *is* that movement, the sign that we are already living a Trinitarian life in the here and now. This is us being taken up into the movement of Christ’s self-offering to the Father. Our problem is not that the world of the former and of the latter are different but that they are the same – only we imagine them not to be. Sin then as a failure of the imagination.

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