This text has been downloaded from the website vitnet.no/?lang=en written by Lars Michael Naess

The age of the periphery. Christ in the cloud

In a time when truth is felt to be fluid and relative, many stand without firm ground beneath their feet. I explore another perspective: that truth is living, absolute and active — and that it still intervenes in human lives.
The book *A Story of God's Help* (Norwegian title *Vitnet* = *The Witness*) grew out of a personal spiritual experience in which I "saw" that truth is living and that it is the foundation of the world. *"I saw that no lie can drive truth out, and that everything will come to light."* This vision awakened a love for the truth and marked the beginning of a journey in which I have tangibly experienced God's help, through events that met my inner search for truth.

Christ's presence is understood less as a power that radiates only from an ecclesial or dogmatic centre, and more as light that also works in the periphery. My experience is that Christianity's visible centre has lost much of its power to reach people. That does not mean that Christ is gone. It means that the centre of gravity, as I have met it, has shifted. The power is found in many ways in the periphery: in what surrounds us, in events we did not plan, in encounters, in the hidden images of culture, in the life that continues to carry us when doctrines no longer do. This power can work back toward the centre and renew the church. It creates belonging between the human being and the world, and between the human being and the cosmos.

I set two clouds against each other: the net-cloud — the dark cloud of information, surveillance and fragmentation — and "Christ in the cloud", the bright cloud that envelops us and bears light down into the earthly.

A Story of God's Help is a novel, but also a testimony

It portrays how Christ's presence "in the cloud" can be understood and experienced in our time — in conversation with biblical images and promises, and with the hope Scripture still holds open: that he will come again.

Many Christians today emphasize the ideal of a "simple faith". But simplicity is only one side of the gospel. Christianity also speaks to the human being's deep, truth-seeking nature. Scripture contains both Jesus' words to the small and vulnerable and Paul's speech about God's hidden wisdom. Faith therefore invites not only trust, but also maturity — an exploring of the depths of Christianity.

I do not write for the many, but for the few who will take this to heart, test it in their own lives and, where possible, against Scripture. I may be wrong. Each person must assemble the puzzle for themselves, adding pieces from their own life.

Christ's return

Many associate Christ's return with a dramatic, visible event in which Jesus appears in bodily form. I bear witness to what I have experienced: Christ at work in what surrounds us—in events, encounters, and what I call "Christ in the cloud," or Christ in the periphery. This is not the final coming that all shall see. It is a presence that requires faith. I read it in the light of Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), and of the Word — the Logos — become flesh. When I say that truth is living, it is not an addition to Christ. It is Christ himself.

The commission I took upon myself was to communicate precisely this: Christ's presence in the cloud, and the help I have experienced there. I took the task because I saw that the help is needed. Much depends on people seeking the truth — not only in great matters, but all the way into small events in their own lives — and daring to try the help, also through the purification and trials that come with it. This is the heart of the message. It is less important to agree with me about the other things I write.

What the Bible says — and how I read it

In Matthew 24 Jesus warns against those who say, *"Look, here is the Christ,"* or *"There he is."* The coming must not be reduced to a place or a figure we can point to. What I describe is therefore not a visible "here he is". It is a presence that must be tested against the Gospels.
Scripture also tells of events in which his presence becomes clear without his standing forth as a figure everyone can point to. On the road to Damascus a light shone around Saul. He heard: *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."* Those who travelled with him heard the voice but saw no one.
On the mountain Jesus was transfigured. A voice came from the cloud: *"This is my Son, the Beloved … listen to him."*

At the ascension he was hidden by a cloud. Two men said that he would come again "in the same way". In the church's reading this points toward a visible coming. At the same time, throughout Scripture, the cloud is an image of glory that both hides and reveals. That is how I use the image when I speak of Christ in the cloud: the surrounding presence — not a substitute for the coming we still await.

John and Paul say that Christ both dwells in us and is greater than we are: *“Abide in me, and I in you.” “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* He *“fills all in all.”* It belongs to his being that he can be in us and surround us.

From the centre to the periphery

Through the church’s long history Christ has been proclaimed from the centre: through the church, the liturgy and authoritative speech. That centre is not empty. But in our time, I have experienced that he also — and for many, first — shows himself from the periphery. The cloud can be understood as an imaginal picture: light streams out from the sun as the centre, strikes the cloud, is refracted countless times and surrounds us on every side. The centre becomes periphery. The holy works in what surrounds us — in events, encounters, destinies and intimations we could not have created ourselves.
The church as it now is still bears baptism, Scripture and a language older than my experience. Without that, the words Christ, truth and coming would soon become private labels. At the same time the church can lose its power to reach people, grow rigid and wound. A more mature Christianity, as I hope it may grow in a time of trial, will — as I see it — come both from what is still borne in the centre and from the light that works in the periphery back toward the church.

When thought becomes alive

The inner and the outer correspond to one another. Sometimes help comes as an outer event that precisely meets an inner need and the thoughts that live within it. At other times, this correspondence reveals itself through an inner vision.

The new help appears as a living correspondence between the inner and the outer. Thought is no longer merely something I carry within me while reality exists outside. When thought becomes alive, connections emerge, and what happens around me can answer what I am seeking and need to understand. In such moments, the distinction between the one who perceives and that which is perceived dissolves. I receive not merely an opinion about what is true, but a certainty about how I should act, or what I should refrain from doing. I understand this as Christ, the living Truth, active in human life.

The most profound experience of this is described in the chapter "The Stable Experience" (read excerpt): a personal revelation of the essence of truth. I also recount outward events, such as "military service," "the red moped," and "the cannon salute," that later confirmed the same reality.

Such an experience is not an entrance ticket. Those who have not had such visions may nevertheless encounter this help in their own lives.

Living thinking is not complete simply because a person has seen the truth. It becomes fruitful only when what has been seen is allowed to flow into ordinary consciousness, awakening and inspiring us, and thereby transforming the way we live.

This also becomes clear in my interpretation of the fairy tale of Per, Pål and Espen Askeladd (the Ash Lad).

The axe, the rake, and the walnut express three aspects of living thinking. Swift insight and deep recognition must ultimately find their way back into earthly reality. The walnut represents thinking bound to the brain and the capacity to test what endures. It serves as a safeguard against self-deception, but it is more than that: the essential thing is the life-giving water that flows from it. Living thinking is not meant to lead a person away from life, but to renew life from within.

The touchstone is life itself. What we have seen and recognized must be tested, with both heart and mind, against the actual conditions of life. It may take time before an insight finds its rightful form and becomes action.

A visible trace in time: the Twelve Step movement

If the presence in the periphery has become clearer in our time, when did such a shift take place?
Here I can only say what I believe, and I am open to being wrong. The early 1930s brought depression, unemployment and the rise of totalitarian ideologies. Hitler came to power in 1933. The Dust Bowl of 1934 can be seen as an image of dark clouds. Kristallnacht, the night of 9–10 November 1938, stripped the Jews of the protection of the law. The shift, as I read it, came when humanity most needed help.
In 1935 Alcoholics Anonymous came into being. I read this movement as a strong sign of how help can work from the periphery: life shared, no single leader who owns the truth, the word passing around the circle, help coming as if from outside, in the space between people.
This is the form of the periphery as I know it. Healing happens. It holds more than psychology alone can carry. I understand it as a place where Christ can work. Others will explain it differently. Each person must put the pieces together for themselves.
That there are twelve steps I read as an image: twelve as the number of the circle. It is not proof. It is a trace.

Presence now — and a coming that has not yet taken place

I believe in both.
I believe in a present presence: help that comes quietly, that requires faith, and that is confirmed within and without. *“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

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I believe in the final coming: that the Son of Man will come with power and glory, and that a new heaven and a new earth will be created.
Righteousness is that Jesus is exalted to the Father. Therefore, he can now draw near in quiet — to help, without abolishing human freedom.

What I bear witness to

The coming of Christ is not only a future event. His presence is also a light in what surrounds us. That is how I have experienced it. That is the calling I took upon myself: to communicate Christ in the cloud.
I do not call this a coming already accomplished that the church must confess. I call it a testimony of help and presence, given to those who will take it to heart and put it to the test.
This is the sign as I have seen it.
This is what I bear witness to.