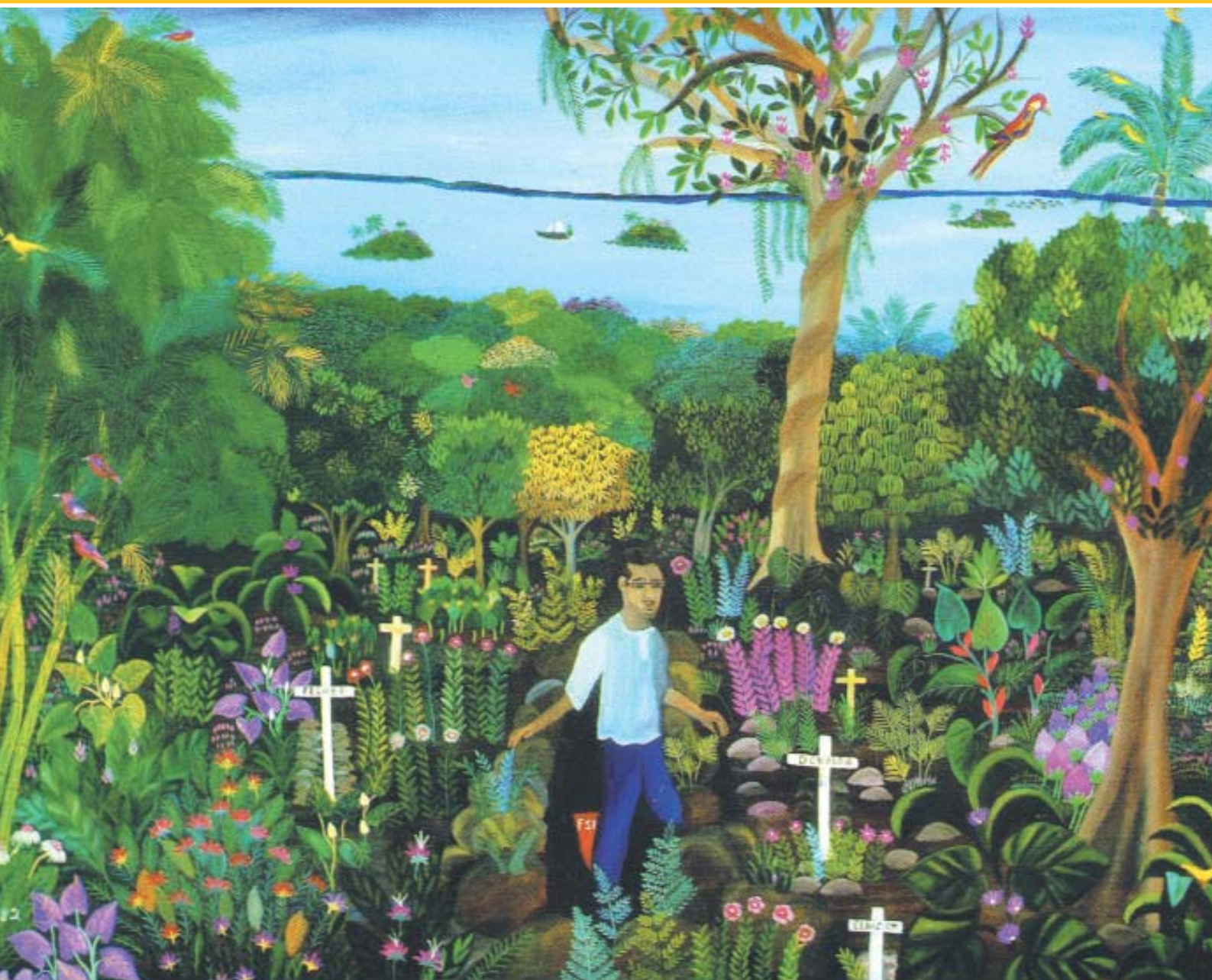




No. 71 May 2005



# *Rise and Shine*



# Rise and Shine

The Easter story and May Day are spring festivals that celebrate life against death, the struggle for *humanity*.

Even on dark winter mornings when we were children my father used to come upstairs and bellow: 'Rise and shine!' Not without the occasional grumble, we would get dressed and go out to help feed the animals before breakfast. Now he is long dead, when I wake up and hear the birds, see the sun pouring in through my window, especially since the mornings have been getting lighter, I feel so grateful for another day, another chance, another spring.

I'm writing this in early April just after Easter. In Regent's Park the robin is singing, the sticky horse chestnut buds have burst and the leaves push out, at first downwards, then fanning out like an open hand. Now the chunky flower-candles are appearing. There's a huge old pear tree in St John's Garden. Any day now its 'leaves and blooms' will 'brush/ the descending blue; that blue is all in a rush/ with richness...' What is all this juice and all this joy? Hopkins replies: 'a strain of Earth's sweet being in the beginning/ in Eden Garden.' But as well as looking back there is a looking forward, a feeling of expectation. Earth's beauty *aches*. There is a sense of ludicrous contradiction in gazing at those glorious trees and then walking out into the street to see homeless beggars lying on the pavement or people being abused and degraded by grinning young soldiers on television. The whole creation (Rom. 8:19) is 'groaning in labour' waiting with eager longing for 'the freedom of the glory of the children of God'. 'And not only creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly', hoping for what we do not yet see.

Giles Hibbert's article *Easter, the Feast of Liberation* rejects Easter as a 'conjuring trick with bones' and explores it as a spring festival, the day of light, that proclaims the liberation of all from slavery. 'The Resurrection,' he writes, 'is presented as occurring on the first day of the week – on Sunday – , that day on which, according to the "creation narrative", God said: "Let there be light!"

Rising to new life like the Earth in spring, Christ, 'the firstborn from the dead', inaugurates a new humanity to fulfil the promise of Earth's yearning 'flowersong', to bring justice ('the kingdom and its justice') on Earth. This is the 'realised eschatology' of love in action. 'The

Son of God became human so that we might become God,' wrote Athanasius in about 325. In the Resurrection story, God 'empties himself' in death on the cross. Christ rises as the first sprout of the new humanity with another chance to 'redeem itself'. We created God, projecting onto him our ideals of human possibility for love and justice. In Christ we reclaim them as human. 'God,' says the Nicaraguan priest Uriel Molina, 'does not say "I am" but "I will be"' (an 'emergent property', as Anthony Freeman put it). And the Creed of the Nicaraguan *Misa campesina* (written in Solentiname – the primitive painting of the Resurrection painted there is on the front cover), describes Christ's resurrection as an ongoing process in the continuing struggle for justice – not just in the present tense but the *present continuous*: '*vos estáis resucitando*: you're rising again'.

In the second article in this issue, John Gamlin writes about energy. (Energy, says Blake, is eternal delight.) Energy is physical. Energy is real. 'No concept,' Gamlin writes, 'would form into absolutely everything we sense and experience, nor be the difference between something and nothing. For without the presence of energy there is just - nothing.' He goes on to consider the trinity: energy, life and spirit as different aspects of the same thing.

In a similar vein, I was thinking about the traditional dualistic division of love into *eros* – sexual love – and *agape* – kindness. Of course, raw energy can express itself in violence and killing and sex can be exploitative. Nevertheless, I don't think we should deny the kind of beings we are – intelligent mammals – and just as the trinity of energy, life and spirit can be regarded as 'different aspects of the same thing', so can the pair *eros* and *agape*. The same tits are enjoyed in their own ways by a lover and an infant, and are the vehicle for our agapeistic metaphor 'the milk of human kindness'. *Eros* and *agape* often go together in all sorts of combinations 'because we are so mixed.' For example, the Nicaraguan Revolution also produced countless love poems (see further pages 22-3).

A certain demonisation of sexuality – particularly male sexuality – seems to be fashionable at the moment. But surely the paschal candle itself, that rises and shines, is a phallic symbol. It is also physical, praised in the

*Exultet* at the Easter Vigil as 'wax formed by the mother bee for the substance of this precious candle'. And in the gladness of May, the Maypole is another celebration of sexuality and fertility; it has even been suggested that the Maypole dance of interweaving ribbons is a representation of the double helical DNA! May Day is also the workers' holiday that looks forward to a fairer world. As William Morris said.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly May Day is above all days of the year fitting for the protest of the disinherited against the system of robbery that shuts the door betwixt them and a decent life; the day when the promise of the year reproaches the waste inseparable from the society of inequality.

Or in his poem *The Pilgrims of Hope* sex and the struggle for justice intermingle:

But lo, the old inn and the lights and the fire,  
And the fiddler's old tune and the shuffling of feet;  
Soon for us shall be quiet and rest and desire,  
And tomorrow's uprising to deeds shall be sweet.

But poor William Morris! He does not seem to have had much luck in his marriage; his wife Janey was notoriously unfaithful.

Unlike the Stygian tube, travelling on a good-tempered London bus can be a pleasure. (Incidentally, before the outbreak of the Iraq war, a red London bus carried the 'human shields' to Baghdad.) Londoners, who collectively speak more than 300 languages, are very quick on the uptake and may greet all kinds of eccentric behaviour with an amused, gentle, 'seen it all' smile that spreads round the bus like the sun coming out. Unfortunately, the bus conductress on the number 24, who regularly sang opera to music-hall from Hampstead to the House of Commons, seems to have retired with the Routemasters, but the other day I was on a 29 bus going to Finsbury Park and four young men were joshing in a language unknown to me. I asked the one sitting next to me: 'What language is that?' He replied: Arabic. I said: 'Sounds as if it's got a lot of ...' – and I produced a velar fricative as at the end of the Scottish word 'loch'. 'Yes,' he said, 'and a lot of ...' – and he made a sound like 'shtum', gave me a delighted, friendly smile, then went on speaking his language with his mates. As well as feeling – what might be called – 'agapeistic' disgust at some of our electioneering politicians' scaremongering rhetoric against immigrants, I noticed the beautiful shape of his head and the way his hair sprang back from his brow. Of course, as a respectable granny now, I refrained from patting it, in case he thought I was a daft old bat. But there was that sparkle and we both enjoyed the small exchange.

Recently, Jon Snow hosted a television vote on the New Ten Commandments. The results were blessedly secular (might they have been different in the US?) and the number 1 winner was the 'Golden Rule', which Snow pointed out occurs in some form in most religions:

'Treat others as you would have them treat you.' Though God has gone, no love, even 'religious' love, is objectless. Jesus tells us to 'love one another', love our neighbours, love our enemies.

The Entry Song to the *Misa campesina*, mentioned above, begins: 'You are the God of the poor / the down-to-earth, human God.' It continues:

You eat out rough in the park  
with Eusebio, Pancho and Juan José  
and when there isn't much honey,  
you complain that the syrup is thin.

I've seen you at a street stall  
and in the corner shop,  
seen you touting lottery tickets  
without being ashamed of your job...

This, of course, is a version of Matthew 25: 35: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...'

In *Piers Plowman* after dying on Good Friday, Christ descends into Hell and challenges the 'Doctor of Death' at its Gates:

I that am Lord of Life, love is my drink  
and for that drink today I died upon Earth.

Love challenges the 'doctors of death', even if it means laying down your life. For example, when Oscar Romero preached a sermon: 'I beg you, I beseech you, I order you: Stop the killing!' he was shot dead within the week at Mass in his own cathedral.

Dying for life, 'the Lord of Life who died reigns alive.' Easter is the story of life against death, the struggle for *humanity*. The Easter story glorifies the body, the human form divine. It says *Respect the body*, everybody, each individual, and the Earth herself, the body to which we all belong.

<sup>1</sup> In *Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution* by Margaret Randall (Vancouver 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Article in *Justice*, May 1st 1896.

#### Correction to *sof* 70

*Homo floresiensis* was discovered on the island of Flores, not Ebu. Ebu was the local name given to the little people themselves. Apologies for the editorial error.

# Easter, the Feast of Liberation

The Resurrection is presented as occurring on the first day of the week, that day on which according to the 'creation narrative' God said: 'Let there be light!' Giles Hibbert rejects Easter as 'a conjuring trick with bones' and explores it as the day of light that proclaims the liberation of all from slavery.

Just over twenty years ago (in 1984) David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham, announced that the Resurrection of Jesus was a 'conjuring trick with bones'. Shock horror! Furore! Worse than *Honest to God* – typical Anglican 'liberalism'; the baby thrown out with the bath-water, but in a more than usually offensive manner. Jenkins was denounced by the media – who almost certainly had no belief or interest in it other than as a sensation. Everyone *knows* that this is what Jenkins said for almost every newspaper, all the media, radio and television carried headlines – proving its truth. And, hardly surprisingly, God struck the pinnacle of York Minster with lightning on account of such blasphemy.

**The Gospels were not written by newspaper reporters – though even if they were we could hardly get more disparate accounts than are to be found in them.**

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What Jenkins actually said was that if you treat the Resurrection as a 'conjuring trick with bones' then all you will have is a God who is a conjurer. *Verb. sap.* This will be our starting point for it has been quite normal throughout the Christian tradition to do precisely that: to treat not only the resurrection, but the incarnation, the virgin birth, transubstantiation, papal infallibility – you name it, inside or outside of Scripture – as the actions of a very clever and manipulative Conjurer God *who pulls it out of the hat*, or puts in an interfering finger here and there when things get difficult. And yet he can't stop earthquakes or tsunamis, or doesn't want to – God moves in a mysterious way. Perhaps he wants to *punish* us – as with AIDS, malaria, crop failure and so on.

## What actually happened?

What happened that night of the Resurrection, or early in the morning, if it wasn't a conjuring trick? It depends, of course, on what one means by 'happen' – the actual facts, perhaps – but 'what is normally called

fact is a miserable abstraction, torn from its context, uprooted and dead'.<sup>1</sup> The 'real', by contrast is when the facts are integrated into their context in life, through poetry and drama.<sup>2</sup> So it's no good simply searching for, and trying to go back to, the 'facts' of the resurrection – which can possibly be searched out, through scholarship, from either the Gospels themselves or by archaeological research. The Gospels were not written by newspaper reporters – though even if they were we could hardly get more disparate accounts than are to be found in them. At a very simple (though actually a very deep) level one cannot say what happened. One has to approach the subject in a very different way, with a very different idea of what 'happening' means. And only then is it possible to escape from the idea of *conjuring* and get beyond it.

Jesus, I think we can say with a certain amount of certainty, spent the last night of his life celebrating, together with his disciples, either the Passover (Synoptics, Paul) or an Agape preceding it (John) – though, in all these accounts, we have to be aware that we are not being given 'facts' so much as their interpretation. The later Church – not all that much later – saw this gathering as involving an offering to God of the lives of those sharing that meal, which itself led to the crucifixion and death of Jesus, to the denial of Jesus by Simon Peter, and to the 'chaotic' indifference portrayed in the opening of Jn 21: 'Let's go fishing' – back to square one. But No! as the Evangelists saw it led beyond that; to life, not death – to the Resurrection and the gift, from God, of the Holy Spirit. Is this just 'wishful thinking' or is there reality to it? We are back to that word 'reality', and how it relates to 'what happened'.

## Sharing life

A new concept has, however, been introduced here: *the lives they shared together*, which was symbolised at that 'last supper'. Sharing life is not just walking in off the street and saying 'here I am, thank you for welcoming me' (often in response to the 'do-gooder' charity worker), but something more radical. It is sharing a whole history of life, of hopes, rejection and expectancy. When we come to Jesus and his companions this is all about their position – in relationship to God – within the history of the People of Israel – those who thought of themselves as God's 'Chosen People' – a way of thinking rejected by several of the Prophets of old

(Amos, Ezekiel) and indeed by Jesus. 'The day of the Lord shall be a day of darkness, not of light. You have destroyed your sacred status, by violating the Covenant, getting your liturgical rubrics perfect but at the same time grinding down the poor and the wretched' – to paraphrase Amos. And consider how, in the Last Great Judgment scene (Mt 35:21-46) those who expected top places in the New Kingdom were puzzled by being rejected.

Despite this, and a number of other failures – 'whoring after false gods' for example – which involved their condemnation, though not rejection, the history of Israel is full of expectancy and hope. They awaited a new Messiah, a king – a concept which at that time took many forms, the chief of which was probably that of establishing a theocratic and anti-Roman government. Many would have been expecting precisely a 'conjurer God' – that, surely, was what was being rejected when Jesus said: 'Do you not think that, if asked, my Father would send a whole army of angels – but this is not the way to fulfil the scriptures.' (Mt 26:53) Also the 'bad thief's': 'Are you not the Christ? Then save yourself and us.' (Lk 23:39) This too, rather than some other-worldly spirituality, is what is implied by Jesus' reply to Pilate 'My kingship [kingdom? – JB, etc.] is not of this world.' (Jn 18:36) We will come back to this; it is radical.

## Understanding the Gospels

It is of extreme importance, if one is going to understand the significance of anything in the Gospel 'stories', to realise that the response to Jesus of his disciples – and thus what we were given by the Evangelists – was to see *in him* the fulfilment of all that hope and expectation of Israel – something which was very much alive amongst them. This is the way in which the various versions of the Good News are presented. 'Who else could we turn to?' (Jn 6:68) It is explained in detail on the road to Emmaus (Lk24:13ff.); and when at Caesarea Philippi Jesus says, 'But who do you say that I am?' and Peter answers 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', this is what is at the heart of it (Mt 16:16).

But who is this Christ, this Messiah (the Greek is a straightforward translation of the Hebrew); and why Jesus? Perhaps it is better to ask: 'What is he?' for Christ is not a surname, as we for the most part use it, but a title: Jesus, the Christ. The phrase 'Jesus Christ' occurs with considerable frequency throughout the New Testament. Indeed, right at the beginning, the third and fourth words of the NT are *iesou christou* (in the genitive case.) Of course (like there) it occurs with several different case endings, but always *without* a definite article: so, 'Jesus Christ', as if it were a surname, rather than Jesus the Christ, as if giving a title? This, however, does not in fact mean that 'Jesus Christ' is the correct way for it to be translated and presented by us in our current versions. Greek uses a definite article but no indefinite, Latin has neither, modern European languages (at least) normally have both. This does not, however, mean that the definite article in the *Koine* Greek of the New Testament had the same role within the language as the definite article does with us. There is no one-to-one correspondence between words when



Head of the Risen Christ detail of statue by Michelangelo

being translated. The correct translation depends, not on some absolute 'meaning' of a word, but rather upon its use within the language. I suggest that putting *christos* after *iesous* is in fact applying a title (not a 'surname' of any sort), and that it is in fact correct (as well as theologically expedient) to translate it as 'Jesus the Christ'.<sup>3</sup> This is not nit-picking, but of considerable importance with regard to how we see both his role in history and *ours* as his disciples.

## Christ the King

The word, in either language, Messiah and Christos, simply means 'anointed', or the anointed one – and in Hebrew specifically the one anointed to be king over Israel. It started with Saul – a mistake – and went on through David – whatever his faults, standing as the figurehead of kingship in Israel, hence the whole concept of the Davidic line. The role of the King – essentially the agent or deputy as it were, or representative of, the Lord Yahweh, the only true and ultimate king – was twofold: to organise and lead the army in defence against attack by hostile neighbours and to sit in judgment, giving justice to those oppressed – so that the outsiders might come in and the oppressed be protected, the un-cared for cared for. So that, all together, God's People might genuinely be a people, sharing life and care – *agape*. Unfortunately, through the medium of sixteenth-century English, the word 'justice', so significant here, has come down to us as 'righteousness', turning its significance into 'pie-in-the-sky' respectability – with a Victorian touch of hypocrisy.

Since scriptural times the concept of 'king' has passed through such metamorphoses as that given by feudalism, and more recently that of 'constitutional monarchy', where the so-called sovereign, is meant – despite all its dysfunctionality – to represent the nation, the People(?). Is there anywhere in all of this any connection with the biblical concept of King, either Old or New Testamental? We are robbed of one of the richest of concepts, especially since, as those who shared Jesus's 'Last Supper', his resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son (forget the problems over the Nicene Creed and its alteration,<sup>4</sup> but consider John 14:17, 20; 15:26) we, as his friends (Jn 15:14 – that is his companions, even lovers), his sisters and his brothers, his Father being 'our Father', are called to share his work, to be co-messiahs with him. His kingship is our kingship – the fight for justice, for the poor, the deprived, the outcast, the despised, the diseased, of every colour. That is what kingship means – through Jesus, *the* Christ, the anointed one. In his 'last supper, in his death, and thus in his 'resurrection' – the triumph over that death – we too are anointed. We are called on to be one with him in kingship – to sit in the seat of justice and to fight against the forces of exploitation, the way we give value to power, riches and position (Mk 10:25). When will we take seriously the words of the Magnificat?

**Unfortunately, through the medium of sixteenth-century English, the word 'justice', so significant here, has come down to us as 'righteousness', turning its significance into 'pie-in-the-sky' respectability.**

By contrast the Church has traditionally supported such oppressors as Pinochet, Batista, and even Pétain. And it took nearly two thousand years for the Church to abandon its ideological support for slavery.

## Liberation

According to the Bible's vision and presentation of history the theme of *liberation* considerably predates that of *kingship*. 'God's People' were effectively set up as such when they broke from Egypt in the Exodus; they were later, after some hesitation (cf. Judg 9), consolidated as such under the messianic kingship. These two themes, however, run side by side. To be a People, as understood in the scriptural traditions, it is necessary to be free, to be liberated from servitude – internal, or external.

The Passover, at the heart of Israel's religion, was not a Temple feast, which would imply its being Jerusalemic, kingly. It was of the family, but the family

bound by the whole concept of 'neighbour'. In the New Testament it has the prominent position of being the context of the offering which led through to the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is shared, according to the Synoptic Gospels and the Pauline tradition, by Jesus and his followers at that 'last supper', being the 'feast' of the liberation of God's People from slavery – though its origins seem to have lain in the spring festival of a pastoral people evolving into a settled agricultural way of life. Whether that last supper of Jesus and his disciples was or was not 'in fact' a Passover (the Fourth Gospel after all explicitly rejects the idea, and seems by and large to have the more accurate 'details'), the point being made – the value assertion – of those who interpreted it in that way is that, although the immediate follow-up is betrayal and death, this death is actually the triumph over death, its destruction by the creative power of life – shared in historical continuity with the history of Israel.

## Conclusion

If the Resurrection is seen under the rubric of 'What happened next?' (and quasi-attempts by the Gospels to do this are evident though not altogether convincing) it is almost impossible to avoid treating it as a 'conjuring trick'. Seen, however, as following that last supper, both as a Passover and/or John's agape, and seen as summing up the history of Israel behind it, it can better be understood as the creative destruction of darkness by the light; hence the Resurrection is presented as occurring, not on the Sabbath (Saturday), but on 'the first day of the week' (Lk 24:1) that day on which according to the 'creation narrative' God said 'Let there be light!' (Gen 1:3) This is significantly the day of the Sun (*Sunday*), the day of life (shades – beams? – of Akhenaton, the sun-worshipping pharaoh/philosopher perhaps.) Unlike the Sabbath which insists on a day of rest for those in servitude, the 'day of the Lord', of the Resurrection, of light, proclaims by contrast our liberation – the liberation of all, from slavery.

To conclude I think we can say that the Resurrection as 'conjuring trick' is the opium of the faithful – it is a betrayal of the Christ, and of ourselves.

21 March 2005

1. G. Wilson Knight, *Principles of Shakespearean Production* (Penguin, 1950).

2. *ibid.*

3. Cf. Giles Hibbert, 'The Christ', Electronic Library, Blackfriars Publications: [www.blackfriarspublications.co.uk](http://www.blackfriarspublications.co.uk)

4. The phrase 'and the Son' (*filioque*) was added by the West without the consultation of the East in the VI Century, and has been a source of contention ever since.

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# Energy, Life and Spirit

John Gamlin explores the trinity: energy, life and spirit. He is a non-realist about God but not so when it comes to the physical world.

I believe I know it. Or perhaps I should say as far as I am concerned this is it; the stuff which is at the root of everything. I boldly suggest that this, whatever it is, is as real as they come, the ultimate essence from which all else has derived. Not a replacement for God, but frequently referred to using terms which have been used to describe that all-powerful, all-knowing, in-all-places-at-once fellow who lived up there in the sky.

That 'it' is energy. The thing which physicists recognise is there, but have never been able to precisely pin down. When asked they will probably say what it does rather than what it is, using statements such as 'energy is the capacity (or power) possessed by a body to do work'. Pressed further and they may respond 'energy can neither be created nor destroyed, only changed from one form into another'. Two statements which any attentive student of school physics will be able to repeat without hesitation - and accept without further question.

When I was practising as an assistant lecturer for the Open University the printed material for the course I was teaching described energy as an abstract concept, an idea, a mental model. It is surely nothing of the kind; if everything really did start with an explosion of an infinitely small, infinitely dense and infinitely hot point of raw energy that over millions

**I believe our senses evolved so that we can appreciate and reason upon the world that is about us.**

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of years formed into stars, planets and all that we are and see about us, it is much, much more than an idea. It is not just an idea which we feel as warmth after it has travelled the 93 million miles or so from the sun. No concept would form into absolutely everything we sense and experience nor be the difference between something and nothing. For without the presence of energy there is just – nothing.

Energy is all there is. Niels Bohr described the atom as composed of protons and neutrons. Since then protons and neutrons have been broken down into smaller particles named quarks and it is now suggested that at the fundamental core of the atom are minute closed strings of rotating and oscillating energy. So at the root of the material atom and hence everything else, maybe there is just energy. We should not be surprised; Einstein's famous equation  $E = mc^2$  expressed the essential interchangeability of energy and matter and they have always lived side by side. After all the single cell, the building block of biological organisms, has energy at its centre, but in this case we call it life, a topic to which I will later return.

Back to our physicist and his principle of the conservation of energy, that it can be neither created nor destroyed. What a claim this is; if it is true then energy was here before all else, and will continue to be so long after all else has faded away. Energy will still be present in every part of that cold, even, largely empty expanded universe which is said to lie before us. Uneven temperatures are necessary for things to happen, so no work can be done, no power can be exercised. But energy will be there waiting as it were – for ever.

All very scientific and realist, but I make no apologies for that. Realism is the mirror image of non-realism for one cannot exist without the other. I am a realist about some things and a non-realist about others. I am with Don Cupitt on the non-realist God, but not so when it comes to the physical world. For Don, the Word came first and the material world followed. For him language precedes reality whereas for me the reverse is the case. For Don the world is shaped and understood by our ability to sense it, whereas I believe our senses evolved so that we can appreciate and reason upon the world that is about us.

In short I am one of Don's realist *world people* whom he categorises in his book *Life, Life*. World people see themselves 'set, in a ready-made, ready-ordered physical world.' Indeed so, but I also claim to be a paid-up member of his '*life people* (who) think more in terms of time, human relationships and



stories.' It cannot be so simple to be just one or the other. Sure, there are some whose thinking and speaking never seems to get beyond the mundane, the day-to-day, as indeed there are others who appear to live permanently in the world of feelings and fiction. But I guess that most of us are a bit of each: accepting what we see as pre-existent and given, but also living in the world of people, places and pictures from the human mind, real or imaginary.



I can sympathise with Don who has struggled for nearly twenty years to get over the Wittgensteinian view of the world to his regular readers whilst so many of us are simply failing the message. Failing to see that through language we create everything: 'all our knowledge, our whole picture of the world, our entire way of life'. Our knowledge and picture of the world, yes, but for most of us the world itself – no. Human beings form an intrinsic part of it of course and I take his point on 'outsidelessness', but for the great mass of people who have never read Wittgenstein the idea that language is all simply does not match with their life experience and what they share with others.

For most of us the world is composed of objects, material and non-material, and our senses have been shaped to appreciate that which has been given. The majority of people deal with 'things' day by day, and language is seen as just another tool, used to work upon these things, but not the things themselves. Certainly a very special tool, and one which enables us to create things in our heads as well as make things with our hands. Arguments that the case is otherwise fall upon deaf ears; to deny the reality of material things is for most people a non-issue, a fascinating point of philosophical debate perhaps, but playing no part in their daily lives.

So much for energy – what about life? In physical terms this mysterious ability of biological organisms to grow and reproduce, is simply the opposite of death. At the level which Don is concerned, life is the process of living, the constant interchange of human experiences and ideas. At the physical level life is akin to energy, a way in which work is done and

things happen. Indeed, I find it difficult to draw any clear distinction between them. Life-energy, energy-life; we seem to be talking about much the same thing.

Life (writes Don) is everything. Indeed so, but I suggest not just in the non-realist form he discusses it in his book. If life can be likened to energy then it really is everything – both real and non-real. For Don's world people life is real; a 'force of (human) nature' which is both making and destroying the world. For his life people it is the all consuming passion for living and making the best of the short time we have here. For me energy ( and hence life) is real because it is the foundation of all else that is real. In the human imagination the non-real can come from the real, but in the physical world the real cannot come from the non-real.

And so to spirit. Can it be different or is this just another way of describing the same thing? There seems to be little difference in the way the word is used in everyday speech. 'What energy that woman has! She is simply full of life! My goodness, she has spirit!' Such statements could pour from an observer with little thought to distinguish one from another. In human terms energy, life and spirit are much the same kind of thing, a way of describing the determined go-getter, the do-er who seems to need little sleep or the support of others in their drive to achieve.

The same sort of thing can be observed when addressing physical quantities and qualities. Alcohol based liquid energy sources (such as petroleum) are called spirits which enable a car or other machine to

'spring into life'. Then we have those familiar biblical stories of God appearing to Moses as a flame of fire in the midst of a burning bush, and to the disciples the Holy Spirit as a mighty rushing wind and as tongues of fire. Both were given new life: the first to lead the Israelite people out of Egypt and the second to take the message of Jesus onto the streets of Jerusalem and beyond.

## **In the human imagination the non-real can come from the real, but in the physical world the real cannot come from the non-real.**

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So energy, life and spirit abide, these three; but there is no greatest of them, for in my mind they are all much the same. All are mysterious, ineffable, as one eternal – and not just of our imagining, so in physical terms real. I am with Paul Tillich, John Robinson and Arnold Toynbee, who in various ways spoke of an 'ultimate spiritual reality', but for me not another way of describing God. I am not (as was once suggested) setting forth a 'God of the gaps' hypothesis. Forceful and everywhere maybe, but this trinity is certainly not all knowing, loving, or carrying any other human characteristic. There is nothing here to worship, just a force by another name. I was pleased to note that on a number of occasions in his earlier book *The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech* Don comes close to making the same kind of observation.

Is there no place for the non-real in these things? Yes, of course there is; fun, fiction, fantasy, meaning, feeling and value, and whatever in our dreams goes bump in the night will qualify. Life people can have their day and the contemplative, enquiring and theoretical part in all of us be realised to the full. But with this important caveat – only so long as this is not seen as some kind of 'higher' order of existence. World people and life people stand side by side, not one above the other. The thinker, the artist and the engineer have existed as one or separately since the dawn of modern man and in terms of their place and usefulness we should not choose between them.

Indeed I would go further. There are not in this (nor any other) sense two distinct groups of people at all – not world people nor life people but one people. Rather than have a foot in both camps I believe there is only one camp – the camp where all people dwell. Moreover this unity extends beyond people to all else there is, animate or otherwise. All is of a piece; 'No

man is an Iland, intire of it selfe,' wrote John Donne, but neither is he separated from all else that exists. This is vitally important; the concept of 'one world' which is so much talked about these days is a message that has to be accepted if our planet is to remain wholesome and habitable.

All must now be regarded as sacred, for since the 'death of God' that artificial divide between the sacred and the secular has faded away. Life is sacred, and because it is all we have; it should never be wasted, but lived and loved to the full. If life then energy, that real physical stuff, is also sacred and far too good to waste.

Which leads me back to where I started – with conservation, but of a different kind. If you have been with me up to now and take my point that energy, life and spirit are different aspects of the same thing, then there is as much a case for not wasting this, the source of everything, as there is of life. Strictly we cannot waste energy as such, but we can and are wasting non-renewable energy resources such as coal and oil in ways such that the energy released can never be regained. The material world has been described as 'frozen' energy, hence it follows that to waste that plastic bag or any other physical object is just another way to waste energy.

I need spend no time setting out the case for environmental concern and what we individually or collectively should be doing about it. Readers of this magazine are well aware of the dangers of climate change, global warming and the rest. My concern here is to emphasis how very, very special energy is; just as special as the life which Don focuses on, just as sacred and just as important for life people as it is for the worldly. To save energy is to save life, both now and in the future.

Energy conservation is a religious issue. Whereas at one time we may have spoken of 'saving souls' for another place, now it must be saving life and the human spirit which goes with it, both real and non-real, for this place. Back to Donne's XVIIth Devotion: 'And therefore never send to know for whom the Bells tolls; It tolls for Thee'. The environmental bell is tolling loud and clear, calling us not to honour the dead, but to work for the living. It is a call we cannot, must not refuse.

John Gamlin is a former lecturer in electrical engineering and a resident member of Old Hall, an organic farming community in Suffolk. He is a member of SoF network and treasurer of the Life Style Movement: [www.lifestyle-movement.org.uk](http://www.lifestyle-movement.org.uk)

# A Day in the Life of Bhavnagar, Gujarat

What do we mean by Quality of Life? When David Paterson re-visited Bhavnagar, Loughborough's link-town, in December 2004, he sat down in the dust by the side of the road and wrote this reflection on the variety of life he was part of that day.

When I first arrived in Bhavnagar by the metre-gauge overnight train from Ahmedabad, it seemed like a ghost town. The road up from the station at 5 o'clock in the morning was just a featureless, dusty, pot-holed road with grey corrugated shutters lining it. But that was 15 years ago, and Bhavnagar is now almost a second home.

Today I am there in the mid-morning, and the shutters have been drawn up revealing shops which spill out almost half way across the road on each side, each displaying piles of colourful articles – dress material, shiny bowls and buckets, toothpaste, magazines and a thousand other things. The yard or two of dusty road between is seething with people on foot, on bikes or motorbikes, in auto-rickshaws, or pushing wheelbarrows. Cars honk noisily and force their way through.

Half way along this street is a very smart hotel. Inside, everything is transformed. The hot sun and the dust are excluded. A wide marbled space leads to a staircase, which ascends up many storeys, and the air is clean and cool. The hotel belongs to Arif Khalwa, dressed in white, with red hair and beard, twinkling, roguish eyes and the belly of an 8-month pregnancy. I have been invited to lunch with his family. I meet him at the hotel, but first he goes to say prayers at the nearby Masjid (Mosque). When he returns, I get on the back of his scooter and we join the *melée*.

On the way, we stop at a shop in a rather less busy part of the town and Arif leaves me on the back of the scooter while he gets some sweets for the lunch party. Two old women – in their sixties, I would guess – each dressed in an old, dusty sari and carrying a plastic cup, come up to me with outstretched, pleading hands. I fish in my pocket and find two rupee coins (a cup of tea at a roadside stall would cost 5 rupees). I give them one each, and they go to try their luck with other passers-by. Another old woman appears. I have no more small coins. I say a firm: 'Na'. A younger woman joins her. And then a



*Street scene in Bhavnagar*

woman in her early twenties carrying a boy – about 3 years old, I guess. They keep on appealing, touching my shoulder. I keep saying: 'Na'. It's all very good-natured. The little boy chuckles and we share a wordless joke. The women risk a quick grin before resuming their wistful pleading. Arif comes out of the shop with a huge bag of sweets, says sharply: 'Javu!' (go) and they back off while we drive away.

On the road, Arif's mobile phone rings. He answers it, holding it to his ear with his shoulder while we weave our way through the traffic. We arrive at a large house in a still quieter street (though still busy and dusty by English standards), and enter through the gate in the railings. I am ushered into a large bare room while Arif goes on an errand (something to do with the phone call, I suppose) and gradually the house fills with people. Some young women whom I met a few days earlier come and greet me. Young men I don't know come and join me. There is much greeting, laughing, hand-shaking, joking; and eventually all are present. Cloths are spread on the floor and dishes of food are laid out. We sit cross-legged all round – 18 of us, all male, all ages. In the other room, the women wait till we have finished. There are about 18 of them, too, and as wide an age range.

And then the family go their ways, and I am taken to my next destination in a very smart car with a chauffeur. A nephew of Arif is a senior engineer in the Gujarat oil fields.

I tell this story because it's all about **life**. India is teeming with **life**, and is one of the best places in the world to celebrate the variety, the agony and the glory of **life**. Quite apart from the cows, dogs, goats and chickens which mingle freely with the humans, there are such varied human lives. The Bhavnagar street, which seemed so dead in the early morning, teems with **life** when the sun has risen, and remains so until the shutters come down again around midnight. The shop-keepers, the milling crowd, the hotel owner, his staff and guests, the people praying in the Masjid, the women beggars and the child, Arif's family – if we are to celebrate **life**, we must celebrate it in all its forms.

I probably would not like to be a beggar woman, and maybe the world would be a better place if such poverty didn't happen; but she is alive, as I am. She is part of **life's rich pattern**. I'm not for one moment denying that we humans have a task before us to bring about a steady improvement in the **quality of life** for all, but the experiences of that day, and many like it, in the cities and villages of India, have taught me two things. The first is that we must beware of seeking fuller lives at the expense of those who struggle simply to stay alive, and the second is that **quality of life** has many manifestations, and each of them has something to respect, something to admire, something to teach us. 'Those less fortunate than ourselves' are sometimes more justified in pitying us than we them.

David Paterson is the Chairman of SoF Steering Committee and a founder member of SoF Network.

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## 2 Nepal Poems

### Sadhu

With scrip and scroll and begging bowl  
he moves among the multitude  
and like the cows, incarnate lords,  
is given a special latitude.

And while dogs howl and beggars prowl  
these clerks of Krishna and of Shiva  
sink in silence with the poor,  
walk in rapture of the *gitas*.

### Kumari

The only living goddess in the world seated on her chariot before the Indra festival procession, which represents the rise of Kundalini in Tantra. – postcard

'The world's only living Goddess'  
or 'A clear case of child abuse!'  
claimed our pale protesting hostess.

In the deep pagoda courtyard-well  
the curious and believers stand:  
like a tenement of heaven or hell

with its mausoleum smell. Taken  
very young, cloistered, locked away  
until puberty, then forsaken

for few will ever love and marry  
a once-worshipped virgin, vestal  
who till menstruation was Kumari

seen once a year in festive glory,  
rarely in between. Though  
I saw her at golden-sari'd window  
and am sticking to Her story.

William Oxley

Both poems are from *Namaste: Nepal Poems* by William Oxley, (Hearing Eye, London 2004).

Patti Whaley reviews

## The Myths We Live By

by Mary Midgley

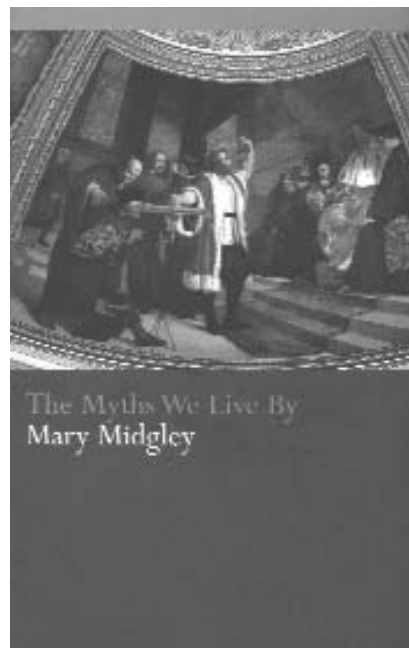
Routledge. 2003. 192 pages. £10.99. ISBN 0415340772

The easy way to read Midgley is to enjoy how well she dissects what she is against. In *The Myths We Live By*, she applies her philosophical scalpel to three prevailing myths which, in her view, are dangerously overgrown: the social-contract myth, the progress myth, and the myth of omniscient science. In 27 short chapters, originally published as lectures or articles and addressing anything from the mind-body problem to the re-introduction of wolves in upper New York State, she takes us to task for applying myths in contexts where they don't belong. Myths, in Midgley's use of the term, are not cosmological stories but underlying constructs by which we organise our perception of the world; they are the assumptions and symbols that shape our thought, without necessarily being visible to those doing the thinking.

Midgley is at her best when arguing against the kind of science that asserts that thinking is reducible to particle physics, that culture is reducible to memes, and that the mind-body problem can be solved by dismissing the mind as an illusion. Such approaches ignore what is empirically obvious: the fact that phenomena can be reduced to a lowest level doesn't mean that other levels are invalidated or illusory. The Brahms fourth symphony, chocolate cake, and the sentence 'George was allowed home from prison at last on Sunday' are all underpinned by particle physics, but are not thereby explained. Her style is lucid, forthright, and punctuated by satisfying one-liners. Comparing current attempts to apply particle physics to culture with Aristotle's attempt to extend human purposes to inanimate objects, she dismisses both: 'stones do not have purposes, but neither do cultures have particles.'

It is not only science that comes in for Midgley's critique; big moral ideas also have their limits. Humanists are taken to task for believing that 'once Christian structures are cleared away, life in general will be quite all right.' Rights advocates are warned that the use of rights-language in inappropriate contexts simply discredits the rights project as too unrealistic to be taken seriously. Psychologists who have become so secularized that they refuse to enquire seriously into the nature of religious experience cannot hope to have a coherent, comprehensive theory of psychology.

One has to dig a little bit deeper in order to figure out what Midgley is for – a characteristic that should make her quite at home with the Sea of Faith! Occasionally she comes out explicitly in favour of something; for example, she is a supporter of the Gaia theory, the idea



reviews

of the earth as an inclusive, self-maintaining system with moral and religious, as well as physical, qualities. More often the reader has to deduce what she holds dear from her critique. She is in favour of a world-view that is joined-up, not by reducing everything to one 'big idea' but by paying due respect to different points of view: humans and animals, individuals and society, science and poetry. She believes that we must pay attention to the human condition as we feel it and experience it; subjective data must be given their due alongside scientific data. She believes in both underlying physical reality and the pervasiveness of social construction: 'It is quite true that, when we look at the Himalayas, every one of us sees them differently. But none of us can think them away, nor put them there in the first place.' She believes in our ability to examine our myths critically and pragmatically, decide when they have overreached themselves, and create new ones.

Where Midgley is frustrating is that she is continually pointing us away from simplistic, partial, one-size-fits-all analyses towards a more holistic, balanced, pluralistic view – but she rarely spells out what that view would be. I felt the same frustration when reading her earlier book *Wickedness*; she is lucid and convincing in her arguments about why wickedness cannot be explained away as just a God-problem, or just aggression, or just determinism, or just a death-wish; but she never gets around to explaining what it is. If you want answers, she doesn't deliver.

But surely this is the point: all answers are partial, and they serve us well only as long as we are able to keep them in their place. We (even in the Sea of Faith!) continually forget that we created the myths we live by – the fact that we live by them is just exactly what makes it so hard to look at them critically. Read in this way, Midgley is as important for how she reminds us to think as for the actual content of her thought.

# An Attempt to Produce an Open Liturgy

William Imray (Brown) is a retired organist-choirmaster in the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Here is the Preface to his *Open Liturgy*, together with some extracts from it, with apologies that we cannot also reproduce the music.

## Preface

This is a form of celebration closely modelled on the Liturgies at present in use in my own branch of Christianity, the Episcopal Church in Scotland. It is intended for use primarily by people who profess no particular faith, who do not necessarily worship any form of god and who may subscribe neither to eschatological beliefs nor entertain any certainties whatsoever concerning life after death. What they will however have is the strong urge to a critical knowledge of self and an unremitting desire to love and to serve. Such people have until now been almost totally deprived of a ritual through which to express their shared aspirations and forge the bonds of mutual support.

Through a long and intimate involvement with the Christian Liturgy, being for the past ten years closely engaged in the matter of its music and hymnology, I have come, while growing more and more estranged from its content, to be correspondingly gripped by the cogency of its form. Its tripartite movement, from Preparation to Offering and from Offering to Receiving, has impressed itself more and more on my sensibilities, until I am now convinced that it may provide the ideal template for any celebration whatsoever, and especially for those who seek to be informed and strengthened in purpose, being already convinced that some deep form of self-offering and commitment will alone make sense of their lives, yet at the same time sensing the need humbly to acknowledge their weakness and dependency and the likely benefit to be had from opening themselves to receive inspiration, guidance and support from whatever source they may.

The present text is tentative and experimental. Fellow labourers, should any emerge, may of course prefer to attempt an entirely different approach. The music though on the whole quite simple, is nonetheless somewhat different from the popularising ditties of the present-day Roman Communion, many of which are frankly an insult to the human spirit.

I should imagine that celebrations like these, were they to become at all current practice, would, as in the Churches, sprout a number of themes, giving shape and variety to their repetition, and that certain of those themes would involve key personalities from whose lives and teaching inspiration may be sought. I have accordingly chosen in this text to centre on Jesus of Nazareth. In doing so I intentionally presented myself with perhaps one of the greatest challenges – Jesus, widely known as the Christ, the Son of God, considered from a viewpoint from which he appears simply as a charismatic human. It would be hoped nevertheless that convinced Christians would feel able to join in such a celebration, designed as it is to be a gathering for all people of good will, *hominibus bonae voluntatis*, where all are free to add for themselves such refinements as they see fit, and the creed of none is to be disparaged.

## From Act I: Preparation

Following the *Gloria* hymn, *Glory to the Spirit*, the Officiant introduces the Theme of the Day – in this case, Jesus of Nazareth. There are Readings and an Address, followed by the General and Particular Calls. Act I concludes with the Collective Call:

### Collective call

#### Leaders:

As to ourselves, may we at all times be moved by the Spirit of Love and Peace,  
of Sincerity and Truth and of a Disinterested Understanding;  
that where we love our love may be without possession;  
that where we support our support may be without indulgence;  
that where we oppose our opposition may be without hatred;  
that where we correct our correction may be no mere settling of scores;  
that where we coerce our coercion may entail the least possible resort to force;  
and that the maintenance of ourselves and our dependants  
may not involve the exploitation of others, the suffering of brute beasts  
or the abuse of earth's resources.

#### People:

To this we consent.  
To this we are pledged.

## From Act II: Offering

### The Call to Grateful Consecration

#### Officiant:

Brothers and sisters, with grateful joy we acknowledge all that we inherit,  
the resources of this world,  
and all that has been fashioned of them,  
the work of men's hands.  
We voice our thankfulness for all we gain  
from the devoted forethought of those who have gone before us,  
for our partial understanding of our universe  
and its harnessing to supply our needs;  
for the moulding of our societies  
and the fashioning of their moralities, their customs and their laws;



for that tentative probing of the mysteries of human personality  
whereby our lives may more wisely be governed;  
and for the unremitting quest for truth in every domain /  
all these the works of the human mind.  
Especially do we confess our indebtedness  
to all who have laboured to enhance our lives  
by the creation of beauty  
or through the superabundance of their loving joy and goodness,  
particularly in the works of rearing, caring and healing /  
fruits of the human spirit.

*People:*

All this we gratefully acknowledge.

*Officiant:*

Mindful therefore of all such blessings,  
we pledge and dedicate our own lives  
with such resources as we may possess,  
corporeal and spiritual, mental and material,  
for the preservation and betterment of our world  
and for the sake of all peoples,  
their children and their children's children,  
and of all earth's creatures.

*People:*

All this we pledge.



## From Act III: Receiving

*Officiant:*

Brothers and sisters, we who have now pledged ourselves in gratitude for so much received, let us now open ourselves in body, mind and spirit to a still further receiving.

But let us first be reminded of the nature of our existence: how deep we are rooted in our universe, composed, as in part we know ourselves to be, of its mineral and vegetable elements, and reliant daily upon them, as much for their continued plentifulness as for the abeyance of their more violent and injurious manifestations. It is right therefore that ritually we now set apart a certain quantity of bread and wine as tokens of this dependency and of this oneness.

And let us not forget that we are also in part constituents of the animal realm, taking our place with brute creation in the struggle for survival, both as individuals and as members of group and species, endowed therefore with equivalent needs, instincts and propensities – a twin-headed inheritance. It is right therefore that for this reason also we particularise bread and wine, as being, in their representative aspect of flesh and blood, that common ground of animal existence.

Nor dare we remain in ignorance how every animal lives upon the death of others, claiming for a season their room. And so it is with us also. It is right therefore and fitting that the bread betokening our common flesh be a bread broken, broken and gathered again for our nurture and sustaining.

Yet we, being, for all our animal nature, so made as to seek a sympathetic understanding, and hence disposed to frame ideals and to follow paths of action in furtherance of others' deliverance from sorrows, must at times engage in conflict with certain aspects of our natural endowment, both in ourselves and as manifest in others, natural endowments to which our own more highly developed propensities have frequently lent their own twists of morbidity, corrupting even our best-seeming ventures. That in this conflict some have engaged with clearer vision and a more enduring bravery than the rest, is past denying. From many such the ultimate price is exacted. And so it is right and fitting that the wine here seen as representative of our common blood should now be poured, and being poured should also be conserved for our continued refreshing.

Nor may it be hidden from our understanding that, in works great and small for the inspiration and enlightenment of their fellows and for the betterment of our common lot, many have drawn strength from diverse sources, from their elders, from their peers, from the recorded words and deeds of predecessors, as also from more covert springs, be those, as some would claim, from supernatural influence, or, by the interpretation of others, from inaccessible and inexplicable depths of the human soul.

It is accordingly right and fitting that, aided by all we here experience and by the spirit suffusing this present celebration – and uniquely in the common reception of these so eloquent elements – we may look to know the access of a like influence. And so, acknowledging our partial nature and our much dependent condition, in humility let us now prepare to receive.

There follows a hymn and then the bread and wine are distributed to the people with the words:

Receive the bread.

Receive the wine.

There is music during the Receiving, followed by the Great Silence, the Farewell and Recessional Chant.

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William Imray (Brown) is a member of SoF network. He was a lecturer in classics and an organist-choirmaster in the Episcopal Church of Scotland, now retired. Further enquiries about this Liturgy may be made to the author at: Coach House, Huntly Place, Aboyne, AB34 5HD (01 3398 87100). Email: [biro@aol.com](mailto:biro@aol.com)

## Holy the Heart on which We Hang Our Hope

Holy the heart on which we hang our hope.  
To trust in Christ is to trust him in the torture.  
Shall we believe in pastor, priest, or pope?

The love of God is learning how to cope.  
I don't believe in the God you don't believe in either.  
Holy the heart on which we hang our hope.

Love is a ditch in which the shallow drown.  
To trust in Christ is to trust him in the torture.  
Sweet is the carriage in which we come to town.

The mind like a drunkard staggers on alone.  
I don't believe in the God you don't believe in either.  
The sink of Sheol opens in the bone.

Love is a ditch in which the shallow drown.  
The love of God is learning how to cope.  
Sweet is the carriage in which we come to town.  
Holy the heart on which we hang our hope.

Sebastian Barker

This poem is taken from *Damnatio Memoriae* by Sebastian Barker (Enitharmon, London 2004). Sebastian Barker is the editor of the *London Magazine*.

It is good that people are challenging our beloved Don over his assertion concerning Shakespeare and 'the physical environment' The list I sent to him by way of complaint differs from our editor's, except for the bit about Perdita's carnations – which just goes to show.

The skill is to bind up thought, character and the real presence of some bit of the world seamlessly in an image. Given Mercutio's death scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, who needs stage scenery? When he says (of his death wound): 'Tis not so deep as a well nor so wide as a church door but 'tis enough, 'twill serve', how one loves the man for his understatement and how vivid is the way the writer's choice of imagery creates the space of the city square.

When I am in an old folks' home - given my sight and that I can ' tell a hawk from a handsaw', I think I shall need Shakespeare mostly for the world around me.

Anna Sutcliffe  
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## SoF ANNUAL CONFERENCE

at Leicester

26th- 28th July 2005

### DETAILS AND BOOKING

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By chance I read Robin Smart's article (*Thinking about Fundamentalism, sof 70*) on my return from a seminar at which the paper under discussion was Nancy Cartwright's on Fundamentalism and the Patchwork of Laws. I was entertained that Robin defined religious fundamentalism as a type of group behaviour (exclusiveness, proselytism and aggression towards non-members) whilst Nancy Cartwright explained scientific fundamentalism in terms of belief (that natural laws are universally true and govern all domains). Fundamentalists (religious or scientific) hold views which they insist are literally true, for all times and in all places. Such a position can only be adhered to with mental eyes shut. Thus any fundamentalist pact must act vigorously to eliminate the destabilising influence of those like ourselves who do not accept that truth is universal and unchanging. It is of much concern to SoFers, who champion flexibility, breadth and depth of thought, that only fundamentalist positions receive media attention.

Realist and fundamentalist views of science are simply assumed, whilst all religion is supposed to be fundamentalist and condemned on that basis (with its practitioners ridiculed for any deviation from literalism!). Even more alarming, I believe, is the unthinking presentation of realist science in our schools. How can we hope for an appreciation of religious non-realism whilst science is being presented as giving total certainty? In promoting non-realism we have a huge mountain to climb. Perhaps our best route will become somewhat clearer at this year's conference.

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This is a contribution to the 'sackful of letters' anticipated by Robin Smart in his article about fundamentalism (*Thinking about Fundamentalism, sof 70*). It seems to me that the definition of a fundamentalist is rather simpler than he proposes and lies in the term itself. Is a fundamentalist not someone whose belief is founded upon some fixed and perfect revealed authority, be it the Bible, the Koran, the works of Chairman Mao or whatever. Everything else flows from that.

Ian Calvert.  
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While I agree with Robin Smart (*Thinking about Fundamentalism, sof 70*) I do feel that his use of the word 'evil' has itself fundamentalist associations and is best avoided – perhaps this year's conference theme 'Beyond Good and Evil' will expand on this. Might I propose a simpler definition of a fundamentalist: someone who believes in objective truth? If there is a core philosophical position to Sea of Faith, it is relativism; in my world there are only relativists and fundamentalists!

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I always enjoy reading and listening to David Boulton. However, he wrote of his disappointment (*SoF International, sof 70*) that members of the Sea of Faith groups in New Zealand and Australia 'both share the UK suspicion of linking radical theology with radical politics' and I felt that I wanted to question those last two words. First, if by politics he means not only party politics but also any action undertaken in the public world based on a desire to alter it, such as legal, educational, administrative actions, then surely any action must be secondary to – the result of – ideas. The job of the Sea of Faith is to produce the ideas. However, and here I agree with David Boulton, beliefs that do not result in action are like an unhatched egg – only promising. Some Sea of Faithers must be brave and start acting on their beliefs; in so many spheres there is a need for people who are able to say, clearly, both that religion does matter and that religion is not confined solely to the traditional forms. It is in making this view clear that the Sea of Faith is playing its most important role.

Secondly, I have noticed that David Boulton often uses the word 'radical' as a form of praise, implying that it is good to hold radical theological views or good to take radical political actions. The trouble is that radical is also used by fundamentalist and literalist traditionalists with the same positive spin to explain why they hold their beliefs. Words are so slippery! I think the Sea of Faith's main job must be to reach out to people who have a religious turn of mind and then explain to them that our turn of mind, though different from theirs, is also religious. We are not here to duplicate political, social or church activities but to infiltrate them, educate them, and use them to produce a world that is a little more kindly for everyone to live in.

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Kathleen McPhilemy reviews

## Against the Flow: Education, the arts and postmodern culture

by Peter Abbs

Routledge Falmer. London 2003. 173 pages. £24.99. ISBN 0415297923

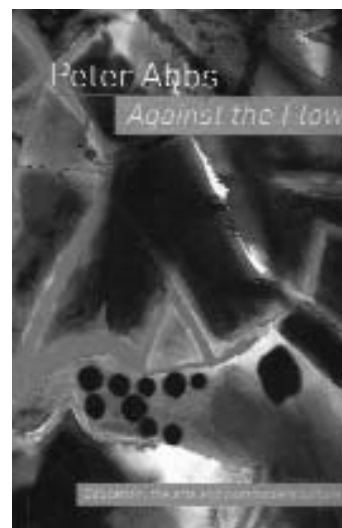
I approached Peter Abbs' *Against the Flow* with eagerness. I hoped it would articulate for me my own unease with the influence of postmodernism on the arts, especially poetry, and on education, as well as somehow supply a rationale for spiritual humanism to set against the absolutes of traditional religion on the one hand, and the reductive materialism of the neo-Darwinists on the other. Certainly, this is a passionately written and erudite work.

In his first chapter, Abbs declares that art is always existential, collaborative and cultural and thus he sets it against the postmodern worldview, which he describes as simply an endorsement of the dehumanising world of global consumerism. He introduces in this chapter the concept of autobiography which he considers central to art and as the process through the Western notion of selfhood has emerged.

While I understand that, without God, spirituality must be located in the human, I am not sure that Abbs does enough to define what he means by spirituality or to justify the identification of spirituality with selfhood. At times, he seems to see spirituality as a refinement of consciousness, and therefore as a part of the evolutionary process: 'spirituality can be conceived as part of, as an unplanned outcome of, the natural world, yet opening up within nature new dimensions of reflection, prophecy and possibility' (p.35) As if himself dissatisfied by this suggestion, he goes on in the next paragraph to suggest, 'God could be understood, at the very least, as an imaginative necessity, perhaps the ultimate expression of the human need for transcendence; the three-lettered sign denoting alterity.' Abbs is an ex-Catholic; at a number of points in this book, there is a sense that he has not supplied enough to fill up the god-shaped hole in his argument.

If he had further developed the ideas of collaboration and culture the emphasis on the self might have been more palatable. Similarly, if there had been more attention to *self in the world*, I might have found the arguments more compatible with my own anxieties. In Chapter 2, he says 'The best resemblances to the mobile life of consciousness are to be found in significant works of art.' (p.37) The intransigent actuality of the world seems to be in danger of disappearing or being reduced to the raw material for art objects.

To be fair, the chapter on education is much more grounded, being a response to changes in education policy over the past half century. Abbs shows how the 'new arts paradigm', which sought to redress the



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emphasis on creativity and self-expression of the sixties with the recognition that children as culture-makers 'are born into history and community', was overwhelmed by the stultifying demands of the National Curriculum. Abbs' comments on current educational policy seem to me to be absolutely right, especially his perception: 'Education in its dominant institutional form has become training, has become investment, has become business and management...' (p.24)

Abbs confronts all the right targets: global consumerism; the flight from meaning and imagination; the reduction of education to training and of poetry to entertainment or advertisement. Many of his touchstones are reference points I would share: Blake, Rilke, Celan. Nevertheless, it seems to me he fails to acknowledge sufficiently the political and physical actualities of the increasingly shrinking world we live in. For example, he takes almost no account of non-Western history or thought. Nor does he reflect historical events later than the Holocaust, although he does trace developments in thought. Hence, my feeling that the real world is missing. Moreover, there are too many occasions where rhetoric is substituted for argument. This is to some extent conscious: 'I have chosen a poetic and philosophical language to pit against the anodyne and functional language of current educational discourse.' (p.4) However, it does not always work, especially in Chapter 7, *Thirty-nine notes towards a new metaphysical poetry*, which seems to fall uneasily between Wallace Stevens and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Poetic language has to 'make it new' and Abbs does not always manage to do this. For example: 'The intense heat which makes such transformation possible is provided by the burning coals of the imagination.' (p.108) This is an image which belongs to the industrial revolution and could have been lifted from *Frankenstein*.

It is in our nature to be more critical of our friends than our enemies. This book is well worth reading for its stimulating and controversial attempt to go 'against the flow'.

Andy Kemp reviews

## Seeing is Believing: Faith in the Tate Collection at the Tate Liverpool

*Seeing is Believing* has its eye-opening moments, but this is not a conventionally curated show and perhaps that is why it has a gawky defensiveness about it. It is a collection of individual preferences, and as such says more about the search for personal spiritualities than it does about religion's power in the modern world or the role of religious art.

First: the gripes. The interpretation panels are a distraction: the testimonies of advisory group members often merge misleadingly with background information about the artist or the work. There is a dominant sense of safety and predictability, of 'religion as it has been organised and received'. I only laughed once: at Stanley Spencer's cartoon-like *St. Francis and the Birds*, surely ripe for computer animation.

There are several Creations, two Adams and an Eve; two Madonnas, a juvenile John the Baptist, a Last Supper and at least three Crucifixions. But, to its credit, the exhibition does escape occasionally from the Judaeo-Christian bias of the Tate's back-catalogue. The two biggest explosions of colour come from Bridget Riley's entrancing *Nataraja* (the Hindu Lord of the Dance) and Anish Kapoor's *As if to Celebrate I Discovered a Mountain Blooming with Red Flowers* with its spice-market mounds of pure pigment. Shirazeh Houshiary, a Muslim, probes our cultural assumptions with her monochrome *Veil* and *Shroud*.

Two of the 'Young British Artists', Mark Wallinger and Damien Hirst, are reliably unsettling. Four of Hirst's thirteen giant screen print pharmaceutical labels – *Beans & Chips*, *Steak & Kidney*, *Sausages* and *Chicken* – from his *Last Supper* series, stand together like rood-screen saints. I find myself wondering which is Jesus at this cure-all Communion? And, is Peter the *Chicken*? Mark Wallinger is on video, inhabiting his curious alter-ego, *Blind Faith*. *Hymn* shows him on his Primrose Hill soapbox. He holds a helium-filled balloon bearing a picture of himself as a child and inhales from a helium cylinder at regular intervals. His gas-altered childish voice sings Albert Midlane's saccharine verses: 'There's a friend for little children above the bright blue sky'. At the end he releases the balloon and falls from the box. The piece manages to be amusing, sad, eerie and irritating, all at the same time.

The other video installation is Christian Jankowski's *Holy Artwork*. It features the Texan Harvest Fellowship Church and their tele-evangelical pastor, who is capable of the kind of stream-of-fundamentalism delivery that could make your ears bleed. One suspects this should be viewed as a piece of 'found art'!



*Missionary Position II* by Sonia Boyce

Certain works gain power from this setting. The religious tension in Sonia Boyce's *Missionary Position II* is heightened by one's awareness that the Tate building was formerly a store-house for colonial trade. The lack of space and the difficult lighting conditions mean that the nine exquisitely embossed mosque floor-plans – *Enclose and Identity* – by Turner Prize runners-up Langlands and Bell, have to be peered at to be seen at all. Staring at the serene white papers, it is disconcerting and salutary, in these Islamophobic times, to find William Johnstone's threatening *Golgotha* and Graham Sutherland's hysterical *Crucifixion* reflected onto their stillness.

The work which really blows me away is *Adam* by Didier Vermeiren, which the *Sunday Times*' Waldemar Januszczak dismissed as: 'a tottering pile of plaster'. This piece requires some wrestling with. I begin by searching the upper layers, casting about for Adam's – or humanity's – remains, but the tomb seems to be empty. I suddenly realise that I am looking in the wrong place, these layers are God's collapsed mould, and Adam is the smart plinth beneath! As I leave, I notice that the edges of God's mould are number coded, so there is always a temptation to reconstruct the old thing and obscure the human.

Ultimately, though, *Seeing is Believing* amounts to less than the sum of its parts, a charge which cannot be levelled at the exhibition showing two floors above it. Richard Wentworth's retrospective is engaged in the genuinely religious tasks of making and re-making connections, celebrating human resourcefulness and exploring the possible meanings of our material existence. And half a mile away is Tracey Emin's newly unveiled *Roman Standard*. Her little spirit-bird dances in and out of view on its slender pole, chirruping at that indigestible hunk of a Cathedral. Now, I believe!

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This exhibition was on show at the Tate Liverpool from 11 December 2004 - 2 May 2005.

Cicely Herbert reviews

## **Die Walküre from Richard Wagner's Ring Cycle at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden**

My first *Ring Cycle* was in 1960 when, as a musically unschooled usherette I stood through all four operas, occasionally popping out for a cup of tea and a chat. Whenever I returned to the drama, (whether after five minutes or an hour) the same two white-robed singers always seemed to be standing in the same position, and singing the same phrase of music as when I'd left. In those days the audience was elderly and smelled of mothballs. With no surtitles to help, I had not the slightest idea of what was going on, but, I remember, I never slept well after Wagner nights, aware of a pounding heart and a restless longing brought on by the power of the music.

What a long way productions have come since those days. In the latest offering of *Die Walküre* at the Royal Opera House, the young cast sang and acted superbly: climbed perilous ladders, walked down almost vertical slopes, and literally played with fire. At the climax of the thrilling five hour drama I rose to my feet screaming with a wild excitement, quite carried away and elated. Alarmed by such a strong reaction, I realised later that the performance had provided me with access to a latent knowledge that any boundary can be broken – all the forbidden sins, murder, rape, incestuous love, anything is possible in Wagner's land of the Gods.

The controversial set for this new production, a futuristic metallic structure designed by Stefanos Lazaridis, had its moments but perhaps worked better for the first opera in the cycle, the watery *Rheingold*. I found the strobe lighting at the beginning of each act literally unwatchable, but these are minor carpings about an overall triumphant project. Less bombastic than is usual in Wagner, under the baton of whizz-kid Antonio Pappano the orchestra played superbly and was largely responsible for the tremendous energy engendered by the performance as a whole. All the cast looked great, especially the vibrant Valkyries, and sang and acted as well as one might dare hope for in *The Ring*. The central great love scene between the incestuous siblings, Siegmund and Sieglinde, each an aspect of the other, was stunning. The shadow of Sieglinde's abusive husband Hunding loomed over their final ecstatic declaration of physical longing for each other. Above all, Bryn Terfel has the makings of a truly great Wotan. His singing could hardly be bettered and the farewell kiss with Brunnhilde, the much-loved wayward daughter, must be one of the most erotic moments ever enacted on stage.

Wagner was famously the favourite composer of Hitler who responded to the music as to 'an energising



Richard Wagner

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drug.' In his book *Music and the Mind* the psychiatrist Anthony Storr makes a connection between the way Wagner constructed his music, piling on layer upon layer of sounds, and Hitler's oratorical style, which had the quality of an hypnotic incantation or chant in which the voice became an instrument to rouse and heighten the emotions of the crowd.

Wagner was deeply concerned with the ideas and writings of the great philosophers of his time – in particular of Schopenhauer, whose book *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Representation*), he claimed to have read several times, and with Nietzsche, who was at one time a close friend. The music critic Barry Millington has written that it was almost certainly not those two philosophers who most influenced Wagner, but Ludwig Feuerbach – whose name, appropriately, translates as 'stream of fire'. Feuerbach believed that, contrary to the conventional belief that God created man, it was actually mankind that created God or the gods. 'All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.' In other words, 'we have created God in our own image.' Feuerbach believed that Love is the source of all joys, but also of all sorrows.

*The Ring* is finally and triumphantly about love and transformation. Millington ends his essay by writing: 'In this interpretation of the true meaning of Wagner's *Ring*, Brunnhilde's all-embracing and transforming love is the force it is hoped will bring one cycle of the world's existence to an end and usher in a glorious new future – one not beholden to superstition and irrationality but dependent on ordinary men and women taking responsibility for their own actions.'

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A parable for our own troubled times?

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Richard Wagner's *The Ring: Die Walküre*, new production by Keith Warner, is on at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden on 8th, 12th and 15th July 2005. Lower price standby tickets are available from 10 am on the day of performance to personal callers at the box office.

# Poetry For Our Times

Mary Michaels reviews

## The Lion in the Forest

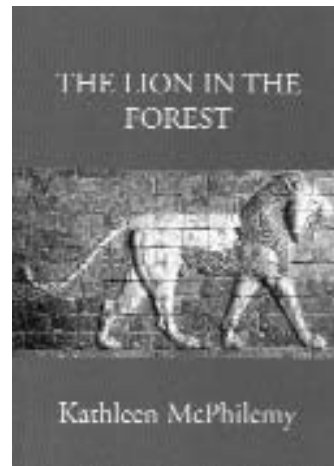
by Kathleen McPhilemy

Katabasis, 2004, 85 pages. £7.95. ISBN 0904872408

A collection which begins with a poem entitled 'Home' might seem to promise a comfortable, perhaps comforting, read. This is not what is on offer here. Kathleen McPhilemy knows that home is not necessarily 'a place of safety,' simply by virtue of her own origins in Northern Ireland. She also knows that 'home' in the sense of a country or culture, is something one can grow out of, or be thrown out of. The child excited by the Orange Order march becomes the adult who recognises in the intransigence of Unionist politics the same mechanisms that created Apartheid ('The Twelfth of July 1996', p.42). Linked by a metaphorical umbilical cord to Ulster, in spite of being settled in England, she is able to see how various other segments of the British population are forever prevented from 'being at home'; the asylum seekers imprisoned at Campsfield House ('Paying for Christmas' p.31); the students whose Middle Eastern parentage earns them the ironic – but not totally ironic – term 'terrorist' ('GNVQ Student', p.30); the boys who grow up seeing 'father with no job ... mother with two' ('Redundancies', p.28). All sympathetically reflected on, among poems that also look into the writer's relationship with houses, animals, family and womanhood.

In the second section, which begins with 'Talking Politics', the focus is exclusively on Ireland; the Ireland in which the assassinations of a civil rights lawyer and an investigative journalist remain, over years, unsolved; the Ireland in which entrenched positions are held through lifetimes and discussion is used simply as a means of digging oneself in more deeply. But also an Ireland remembered from childhood summer holidays; the beauty of a shore-line looking out towards the mist-shrouded Isle of Man. A beauty inevitably tainted by adult knowledge of 'the headlands – where drunken boys chase and beat up strangers / whose skin or voice is wrong' ('In the Clutch of Manannan', p.56). The poems in these first two sections have the flow and immediacy which is the gift to the poet of immediate, personal experience.

In the third section of the book she sets herself the challenge of dealing with events experienced only through television and newspapers. For these she looks to other texts to forge an appropriate language. In the *Suite for Palestine*, she takes as a starting point the poetry of Paul Celan, and uses images from various of his poems to ponder on three paradigmatic existential dilemmas; that of the German-speaking Jew; of the



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person who is both Irish and British; and of the Palestinian. Whether the pinning down of Celan's gnomic and allusive phrases to these specific situations can be entirely justified remains an open question, but there is no doubt that the inspiration of his language lends wings to this poet's own. There are some remarkably strong short lyrical poems in this section; 'The Sandbed' (p.65) - inspired by Celan's 'Coagula' – being a particular example:

What else coagulates?...

like that line of tanks in the desert war  
filled with wasted, molten conscripts  
staining the sand in their red-hot finality.

In the *Sequence for Iraq* it is Biblical language, via Christian liturgy, which provides both imagery and form. This series of ten poems is structured around lines from the Latin text of the *Tenebrae Responsories*, the Catholic 'service of shadows' which is performed over the three days preceding Easter Sunday, with the candles in the church being progressively extinguished until all is dark. A telling metaphor in itself for Iraq, but made more poignant by the poem's reminder that, 'After twenty-five years of darkness... / the light when it came was blinding' (p.72). The Biblical references skilfully weave into the scenario of the recent invasion; 'there is a multiplication of Marys / weeping at the doors of the morgues' (p.75), resulting in something that has the overall feel of a Psalmic lament.

*The Lion in the Forest* is a profoundly felt and thought-through book, which attempts to do justice to complexities (political and personal) and avoids the simple answer, excuse or accusation. The writing has an admirable clarity and economy. It is a moving example of the capacity of poetry to cast light on shadowy places.

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Mary Michaels' poetry collection *The Shape of the Rock* was published by Sea Cow in 2003.

# Mayday Notes



## Harvard Divinity Faculty Visiting Professor Refused Visa

A spokeswoman for Harvard University told the Guardian (4th March 2005) that the University was 'very disappointed' that Dora María Tellez had been refused a visa to enter the US to take up her post as the Robert F. Kennedy visiting professor in the Faculty of Divinity, on the grounds that she was a 'terrorist'. Dora María joined the Sandinista Front to overthrow the brutal dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua, that lasted from 1936 until July 1979. A US President famously said, 'Somoza's a son of a bitch but he's our son of a bitch.' Dora María was 'Comandante Dos' ('Number 2') in the Assault on the National Palace on 22nd August 1978. 'Borrowing' the uniforms of the dictator's gruesome son 'Tacho' Somoza's elite Special Force troops, 25 Sandinistas took over the National Palace, held the deputies hostage for two days, and negotiated the release of sixty political prisoners. The Assault sparked uprisings all over Nicaragua and the dictator was finally toppled a year later on 19th July 1979. In the Final Offensive, Dora María led the brigade that took the city of León.

Dora María was involved in the Sandinista reconstruction of the country, becoming Minister of Health after the 1984 elections. Sandinista health policies introduced vaccination campaigns, eliminated polio and in this very poor country reduced infant mortality to one third of its former rate. They set up many community health posts, including in remote rural areas.

In continual raids the US-backed Contras, mainly based in Honduras, killed 50,000 Nicaraguans and specialised in targeting villages, co-operatives, schools and health posts. John Negroponte was US ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s, supporting the Contras and the Honduran death squads. He supervised the creation of the El Aguacate base in Honduras, where the US trained the Contras and prisoners were tortured. From September 2001-June 2004 Negroponte was US ambassador to the UN. After that he became US ambassador to Iraq and in February 2005 Bush appointed him US Director of National Intelligence. Torture has not stopped. Truth is not forgetting.

## Ministry Publishes 'Rules for Writing Poetry'

Like many in the Sandinista cabinet, Dora María was a poet. Immediately after the triumph of the Revolution in 1979, the newly formed Ministry of Culture under Ernesto Cardenal (one of the most famous poets in Latin America) set up poetry workshops all over the country and published 'Some Rules for Writing Poetry' in the national paper

Barricada. This strikes us as comical and Tessa Jowell almost certainly wouldn't dare do such a thing! However, as bad poetry, especially bad religious poetry, can sound like one of those greetings cards (some news agents even have verse-writing machines!), it is worth briefly summarising these 'rules' for readers' consideration, changing the Nicaraguan examples to English ones:

1. Verse need not rhyme. If one line ends with Sandino do not try to end another with destino (in English we might say moon/June).
2. Prefer more concrete terms to vaguer ones. To say 'tree' is vaguer and more abstract than saying e.g. oak, willow. Good poetry is usually made out of very concrete things.
3. Poetry has added appeal if it includes proper names of people, cities etc.
4. Rather than being based on abstract ideas, poetry needs to be based on things which reach us through our senses, which can be touched, tasted, heard, seen and smelt.
5. Write as we speak with the natural plainness of the spoken language.
6. Avoid clichés and hackneyed expressions.
7. Try to condense the language as much as possible. All words which are not absolutely necessary should be left out.

These 'rules' are introductory, not exhaustive; apart from rhyme, they say nothing about sound, rhythm or shape and, of course, 'Rule 4' does not mean poetry should not contain ideas. Ernesto Cardenal's own 581-page Cosmic Canticle is full of enormous ideas. The 'rule' is saying that in poetry ideas should be embodied, fleshed out in images and concrete details. Ernesto's own short poem 'Meditation in a DC-3' reprinted on page 23, arrives at the abstraction 'communism' (which he equates with 'the kingdom of heaven' - he does not mean Soviet communism) through an accumulation of concrete examples, some of which may surprise readers, considering he is a Catholic priest! Incidentally, the attractively written prose piece on Gujarat on page 11, by SoF Chair David Paterson, does something similar in describing a scene full of details we can both see and hear, before reflecting at the end on the abstractions 'life' and 'quality of life'. Naturally, all these 'rules' can and should be broken by poets with good reason. For example, not all contemporary poetry is 'free verse'; Sebastian Barker's incantatory love poem on page 16 is in a strict form with rhymes, metre and repeated lines. There's no room to say more here but comments are very welcome.

## Comandante Dos

Dora María Téllez  
22 years old  
slight and pale  
in boots, black beret,  
her Guard's uniform  
very baggy.

Behind the railings  
I watched her talking to the lads.  
Beneath the beret her white  
neck.  
and new-cut hair.

(Before we went out we hugged)

Dora María  
girl and veteran  
who made the tyrant's heart  
tremble with fury.

Daisy Zamora

## Meditation in a DC-3

I don't know why I remembered Novalis' phrase:  
'touching a naked body is touching heaven'.  
The military pilot opened his map of our country  
to show the dark little girl of nine  
(it was our land below)  
and his hand brushed her small hand.  
Down there lay Muy Muy, rivers,  
Nueva Guinea where Felipe fell.  
'It's touching heaven...'  
But what if they don't believe in heaven?  
Of course it's not the high blue sky  
that's Earth still  
and flying a DC-3 up here  
in our liberated country's atmosphere  
is Earth.  
But the infinite black starry night  
with our Earth full of human beings loving one  
another  
and all the other loving Earths  
is heaven  
the kingdom of heaven.  
So what did Novalis mean?  
For me he is saying:  
breastfeeding a baby,  
a couple deeply caressing,  
holding hands,  
clasping a shoulder,  
human touching human,  
human skin meeting human skin  
is putting your finger on communism *compañeros*.

Ernesto Cardenal

## Cabinet Meeting

We are summoned to a cabinet meeting,  
knowing in advance it is for a very important reason  
but not what.

All the ministers and directors of autonomous bodies  
round the big table.

And it was a serious matter:  
the setting up of a National Emergency Committee  
for the danger of a plague of *Aedes Aegypti* mosquitoes.  
They breed especially in artificial vessels.  
They can be recognised by the silver lines  
on their thorax.

It is the female that bites human beings.  
She needs their blood for her eggs  
which she deposits in any vessel containing water.  
A preventive campaign must be mounted in  
vases, bottles, old tyres, barrels,  
roof gutters,

get rid of unuseful objects  
keep patios clean,  
air and ground fumigation.

Small and dark  
they carry an infection  
with a high mortality rate among children  
and dangerous to the old.  
Very possibly there will be an outbreak in Nicaragua.  
Material resources. Financial.  
An intensive propaganda campaign.  
Support from all departments: Health,  
Transport, Education, Air Force...  
Involvement of workers and students...

And I look at the serious faces round the big table  
strewn with files, ashtrays,  
and I think: how odd,  
how very odd. It's love.  
The cabinet meeting for love of their neighbour.

Ernesto Cardenal

'Meditation in a DC-3' appears in *Nicaraguan New Time* (Journeyman Press, London 1988). The other two poems appear in *Poets of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Katabasis 1993), which also has a love poem by Dora María Téllez. Both books translated by Dinah Livingstone. Before the Assault on the Palace on August 22nd 1978, poet Daisy Zamora hid half the squad in her house in Managua. 'Meditation' was written shortly after the triumph of the Revolution in 1979. Felipe in the poem is Felipe Peña, a member of Ernesto Cardenal's peasant community in Solentiname. He was one of the sixty political prisoners released after the Assault on the Palace and was killed during the Final Offensive in May 1979 in Nueva Guinea, S.E. Nicaragua. His name appears on one of the crosses in the front cover painting.



The Hardy Tree, Old St Pancras Churchyard

*The Levelled Churchyard*

O passenger, pray list and catch  
Our sighs and piteous groans,  
Half stifled in this jumbled patch  
Of wrenched memorial stones!

We late-lamented, resting here,  
Are mixed to human jam,  
And each to each exclaims in fear:  
“I know not which I am!”

The wicked people have annexed  
The verses of the good;  
A roaring drunkard sports the text  
Teetotal Tommy should!

Where we are huddled none can trace,  
And if our names remain,  
They pave some path or p---ing place  
Where we have never lain!

There's not a modest maiden elf  
But dreads the final Trumpet,  
Lest half of her should rise herself  
And half the local strumpet!

As a young architect in the 1860s, poet Thomas Hardy (who wrote ‘God’s Funeral’) was employed in the removal of graves in Old St Pancras Churchyard to build the Midland Railway. He stacked some of the tombstones in a circle round a young ash, foreseeing the mature tree, roots intertwining with the tombs, as it stands today. It is known as the Hardy Tree and powerfully embodies the organic continuity of death and life. Hardy also wrote the satirical poem ‘The Levelled Churchyard’, an extract from which is printed above.