

Uprisings

Why does the Easter story matter if we know Christ's uprising is just a story? It matters because the Christ Epic is a very powerful myth or vision of humanity, of achieved human kindness.

Jesus himself preached the coming of what he called the reign of God or we could call the reign of kindness. He attacked the money-men who had made the Temple 'a den of thieves'. This made him a troublemaker and he was crucified as a criminal. So Jesus was both a martyr for the cause of kindness and the innocent victim of the ruling powers of his day. Jesus was mistaken in thinking the reign of God was about to come on Earth. It has not come yet and as there is no supernatural God to bring it, we have to do it ourselves. But the vision remains.

When Jesus' life became immortalised in the Christ Epic, the Christ figure becomes not only the individual man but also the mythic figurehead, protagonist of the word and struggle for a humane humanity. He is 'the new man' or, a better translation, 'the new humankind'. The Christ becomes all the innocent people killed by oppressive ruling forces ('you did it to me'), and also all the people rising and striving together for a better life. A better life is both personal and political – personal lives that are happier, kinder and more abundant, and a kinder, fairer society, which benefits not just the most deprived but all of us. In fact, in our history the Christ Epic has helped to inspire many struggles. Examples of some are given in 'Some Christological Moments' on page 8.

In this *Sofia's* first article, 'The Resurrection', David Morgan investigates natural and supernatural accounts of the Resurrection. In his piece on 'Green and Pleasant Misery, Dark Satanic Struggle' Kevin Beint exposes the myth of an idyllic rural England and recalls the urban, industrial roots of the nineteenth-century working class movement. In 'Restoring to Life' Dominic Kirkham writes about the industrial past of Gorton in Lancashire and the present local efforts to restore Gorton House and Debdale Park for the good of the community.

In his *As I Please* column Dr John Pearson explains why he, Vice-Chair of SOF trustees, is

making a bid to join the General Synod, and he mentions the new book *On Rock or Sand?* edited by John Sentamu, Archbishop of York. The book also contains an essay by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Sentamu's introduction and conclusion offer a ringing reminder that the gospel is first and foremost good news for the poor and in Britain recently this 'good news' has been scarce. When archbishops in England and a pope in Rome consistently make an urgent call on behalf of so many people who lack the necessities for a decent human life, we can only hope their message will be heard. The vision needs to be regained; since now, as Sentamu puts it:

The gulf continues to widen between those who have plenty and those who are struggling to make ends meet, with the misery of fiscal deficit and deep cuts in public expenditure, of rising levels of student and trade union unease, and of low levels of trust between elected representatives and those whom they govern.

There will soon be a general election in Britain. I constantly hear people speaking with dismay about the choice of electable government before us this time: 'The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.'

In this *Sofia's* final poem, 'The Message of the March Wind' with its upbeat anapaests, William Morris hears in the wind and feels in the beautiful sprouting of spring an urgent inspiration. Easter with its story of uprising – springing up – also enlists the powerful forces of Earth's spring. Morris was just one in a long, tremendous history of the vision and struggle for a kind and just society – one of a great cloud of witnesses. The Christ Epic of the mythical uprising of the protagonist of the 'new humankind' has played a vital part in this. It is not over yet. Not everyone has lost the vision. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, when they are in the Valley of Humiliation, Great-Heart urges against despair:

For my part, as I have told you already, I have gone often through this Valley, and have been much harder put to it than now I am, and yet you see I am alive.

And William Morris ends his poem: 'And tomorrow's uprisings to deeds shall be sweet.'