

Lent and Easter

Sofia explores religion as a human creation and in this March issue several writers with different viewpoints explore Lent and Easter. First, as a founder member of SOF Network, David Paterson has lived through Lent and celebrated Easter for many decades, sometimes as a minister and sometimes as an ‘ordinary person’. For him ‘understanding religion as a human creation and deeply loving the Christian Passion and Resurrection story are of equal importance. I believe that gods and the supernatural are created by the human imagination and poetic genius and do not exist in any other sense; I value them for what they are.’

Asking ‘What do we Keep and Why?’, Dave Francis is more interested in human responses to Lent and the Easter story than the theology. Edward Walker takes another look at fasting, considers Jesus’ attitude to it (he was accused of being a ‘glutton and a drunkard’) and the practice of the early Christians. With his usual curmudgeonly brio, John Pearson writes about ‘Giving up Giving up’.

What strikes me powerfully about the Crucifixion and Resurrection story is its insistence that *humanity matters*. It is a story of *embodiment*.

In the early *kenosis* poem or hymn in Philippians, one who was ‘in the form of God’ empties himself, lowers himself to a shameful death on a cross. He goes down to the depths of human degradation, takes it all on and then this *man* is raised high above all the powers ‘in heaven, on earth and in the underworld’. Christ becomes the mythical protagonist, ‘head’ – figurehead – of a new humanity that is above and *matters more* than all these visible and invisible powers – such as Money and the Market – that ‘post o’er land and ocean without rest’ and govern our lives now. This new humanity is ‘one body in Christ’ where everyone ‘Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free’ is of equal moral worth – a revolutionary idea.

In Ephesians: ‘When he ascended on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts to humanity. When it says “he ascended”, what does it mean but that he had also descended to the lowest parts of the Earth?’ That developed into the story of the Harrowing of Hell. Christ descends into Hell – *ad inferos* – where he releases the imprisoned. This descent to the depths and rising again resonates with both personal and political life. It can be compared to the process of going down to release and reassume what was repressed in a quest for the integrity of the personality. And for a new humanity ‘in Christ’, his glorious risen body becomes an image of a glorious ‘body politic’, a kind society in which everyone counts and no one is excluded.

The *Exultet* sung at the Easter Vigil recalls the political liberation of slaves as a prototype of the liberation of all humanity: ‘This is the night when you led our ancestors, the children of Israel, out of Egypt...’ Liberation theology says that Christ is to be found first and foremost today in the crucified people, people suffering all kinds of distress and exclusion. In their struggles for a better life they aspire to resurrection. Christ’s body, ‘sown in weakness and raised in power’ can be seen as representing humankind, rising at last to create a kind, inclusive society offering fulfilment for all – a glorious body politic. I think that was why when Blake was asked what he thought of the divinity of Christ, he replied: ‘He is the only God, and so am I and so are you.’

With this issue of *Sofia* you should receive an inserted flier and booking form for the next SOF annual conference from Tuesday 24th to Thursday 26th July (and see advert on page 21). We hope you will be able to come and that you will enjoy it. The organisers are still looking for offers of short talks or workshops.