

*s fia*

No. 119 Easter 2016



*Syrian refugees help clear up flood damage in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, January 2016*

*Fellow Feeling and  
Generosity*

# *sfia*

down to Earth

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**Front cover image:** Syrian refugees help clear up flood damage in Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, January 2016  
Photo: Rethink Rebuild Society

**Back cover image:** Sikh Khalsa Aid volunteers giving out curry to villagers in flood-hit Croston, Lancashire.  
Photo: Lauren Brown/PA



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*Sofia* does not think wisdom is dispensed supernaturally from on high, but that it can only be sought by humans at home on Earth, and is inseparable from human kindness.

*Sofia* regards religion as a human creation and, in rejecting the supernatural, is for humanity with its questing imagination and enabling dreams.

*Sofia* is for diggers and seekers in its own native radical tradition and everywhere.

# Fellow Feeling and Generosity

‘To all my Fellow Creatures that shall view these Ensuing Lines.’ This is the dedication of John Taylor’s introduction to his fellow Digger Gerrard Winstanley’s tract about the Earth as a Common Treasury, published in 1649. I’ve always found it rather delightful that the Diggers used the term ‘Fellow Creature’ as their common mode of address.

It is a pity that the word ‘fellowship’ has become debased, so that to many people it now sounds quaintly archaic or repellently sanctimonious. However, we can still speak of ‘fellow feeling’, ‘fellow sufferer’, ‘fellow student’ and ‘fellow citizen’ and the reality remains very important.

We humans are fellow creatures because we are all the same kind of animal and paradoxically one of the ways in which we are alike is that we are all unique individuals, each of us is a person. That is the kind of animal we are. Each of us needs not just physical things such as food and shelter, but to live our own life, be our own person. We can’t be a person in isolation, we need other people, fellow creatures, to talk to, argue with, dance with, love. All on your own you can’t even enjoy a good laugh. We can imagine how another person feels and that may (though does not always) lead to sympathy, fellow feeling. Do as you would be done by is the golden rule.

The title for this *Sofia* is *Fellow Feeling and Generosity*. As we have noted before, kindness and generosity have the same root, (Proto-Indo-European kn/gn: the former descending into English through the Germanic and the latter the Latin branch). ‘Kind’ means both good-hearted and sort or type (‘humankind’) and is related to kin, akin, German *Kinder* (children). Likewise, generous is related to genus and also to genius, generative, engender. So being capable of fellow feeling means being kind and also the *kind* of animal we are. It is our genius to be generous and such behaviour is fruitful, generative, it engenders more humanity.

We begin this issue Easter issue with an article on Oscar Romero. Francis McDonagh describes how this conservative young cleric, appointed archbishop of San Salvador as ‘a safe bet’ by the authorities, gradually came to find the repression, maltreatment and murder of so many of his fellow countrymen intolerable. He preached a sermon: ‘I beg you, I beseech, I order you. Stop the repression!’ and was shot dead at Mass the day after. His generosity led him to sacrifice his own life; he was martyred for defending *humanity*.

Next, Penny Mawdsley writes candidly about the pleasures, pains and impediments to fellow feeling. She points out it can also take the ugly form of a majority ‘ganging up’ on the outsider. She goes on to give examples from life and literature. She describes how kind Syrian refugees went to help out in the recent devastating floods in the north of England, because ‘they wanted to give something back’. This was not only an expression of their human dignity but also helped change perceptions in some self-confessedly ‘very white’ areas.

Bobbie Stephens-Wright gives the history of her own struggle with depersonalisation and explores how lack of a secure sense of self is a barrier to sympathy with others. Altogether, fellow feeling and generosity prove to be more complex than perhaps we may have first thought.

I offer my second *Theological Reflection* on religion as a human creation. This one for the Easter *Sofia* is on ‘Death and Resurrection’.

\*

With this issue you should receive inserted fliers with a booking form and description of this summer’s annual SOF Conference. It will take place from Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2016 in the usual Leicester University venue. Its title this year is *Religion – Where Next?* We hope you will be able to come and will enjoy it.

# Oscar Romero: the Unlikely Martyr

Francis McDonagh looks at the change in Romero that turned him from a young conservative into an outspoken archbishop and martyr.

## A young conservative

Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez lived through events that dramatically changed the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was born in 1917, the year of the Russian revolution, an adolescent during the great depression of the 1930s, a student in Rome during the Second World War, and at the height of his powers during the decades when the United States supported dictatorships in Latin America in a misguided attempt to defeat communism. And from the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church to which he belonged was also to go through profound changes as the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 was to redefine the church as 'the people of God', not a democracy by any means, but no longer an authoritarian pyramid with Pope, cardinals and bishops at the top and the laity at the bottom. Vatican II also proclaimed that 'the joys and hopes, the anxieties and sufferings, of the people of our time are also those of the followers of Christ', directing Catholics to engage with social issues here and now. This reassessment of the church's role was given a radical development in Latin America in a series of bishops' meetings starting in Medellín, Colombia, in 1967, which proclaimed the 'option for the poor'. This context is part of what made Romero, a timid young cleric, who described himself as 'surly and dry', the target for a right-wing assassin's bullet on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1980.

Oscar Romero was born in the little town of Ciudad Barrios, nestling in the Cacahuatique mountains in El Salvador's eastern department of San Miguel, and received three years of basic education in the local school, followed by some private tuition. In 1930, at the age of 13, having expressed an interest in the priesthood, he entered the junior seminary in San Miguel, which his parents had to finance. Seven years later he was sent to the national seminary in San

Salvador to do theology. The young student clearly showed aptitude, because after six months he was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome, where he obtained a degree in theology *cum laude* in 1942. After the circuitous journey home and a few months as a parish priest, he spent twenty years as bishop's secretary administrator of the cathedral in San Miguel. Here he had to raise funds to complete the construction of the cathedral, which meant attracting donations from the wealthy elite, but he also ran social projects, including a branch of Alcoholics Anonymous and a project to support street children. Former shoeshine boys in San Miguel, who were beaten by their guardians and forced to sleep in the park, have told how Romero formed them into an association, with official identification, which helped to end the beatings. He later built a hostel and a school for them.

One of his biographers, Jesus Delgado, describes his attitude at that time as follows:

It is not that he was unaware of the causes of the problem... But how could he just condemn the rich who were so generous in their support for the church's charitable work? At that time Fr Romero could see only one solution, to encourage the rich in the practice of charity.

Archbishop Romero's youngest brother, Gustavo, in an interview in 2011, made the same point more simply

He got on well with the landowners, he didn't bother them. What he was concerned about was that the workers should sleep under cover, but he didn't fight with the landowners. In fact, he had some friends among them who were filthy rich.

In 1963 Romero moved to San Salvador as rector of the national seminary, where he met and became a close friend of the Jesuit director

of studies, Fr Rutilio Grande. In 1966 he was made secretary of the Salvadorean bishops' conference and editor of the archdiocesan paper, *Orientación*, which under his editorship was described as 'clerical' and 'conservative'. In 1970 he was appointed auxiliary bishop of San Salvador, and consecrated in a ceremony at which his friend Rutilio Grande was master of ceremonies. This was not a happy time for Oscar Romero. The clergy of San Salvador were influenced by the 'new thinking' of the Latin American church, and Romero did not fit.

When the diocese of Santa María became vacant, he was quickly moved there. According to Gustavo Romero, his brother once said that the happiest time in his career was as bishop of Santa María 'because he'd been among rural people, poor people.'

But the period of happiness was very short; the war in El Salvador was closing in on Romero. In 1975, the army burst into the village of Tres Calles at one o'clock in the morning and killed six men with extreme brutality. The priests of the diocese urged Romero to make a public protest, but he refused, preferring to write privately to President Arturo Molina, who was a friend of his. This helps to explain why when, on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1977 Oscar Romero was appointed archbishop of San Salvador, the reaction of the clergy was one of horror. Some boycotted the installation ceremony, and those who did attend did not join in the applause when he was formally presented.

Just under three weeks later, members of an army intelligence unit in plain clothes opened fire on a car in which Fr Rutilio Grande was travelling to El Paisnal to celebrate a novena to St Joseph with two members of his parish team

from Aguilares, 72-year old Manuel Solórzano and 15-year old Nelson Lemus. Romero went immediately to El Paisnal with the Jesuit provincial and celebrated the funeral mass. This time he listened to his clergy and ordered that on the following Sunday no masses should be celebrated in any church in the archdiocese except for one in the cathedral.

Romero, who had previously been taken

aback by Rutilio Grande's radicalism on issues such as agrarian reform, defended his friend in his funeral sermon as a champion of Christian liberation, which he insisted on



Romero with seminarians in 1978

distinguishing from violent revolution:

The liberation that Father Grande preached is inspired by faith, the liberation which culminates with happiness with God; liberation which brings about a repentance for sin, liberation based on Christ, the only saving power. This is the liberation that Father Rutilio Grande preached... How I wish that all those movements that are sensitive to the social question would be aware of this doctrine. For in this way they will avoid failure and a short-sightedness that is unable to see beyond worldly realities and structures. As long as our hearts are not converted ... everything will be feeble, revolutionary, passing and violent. None of these things is Christian.

### Archbishop and martyr

But Rutilio Grande's death marked a turning point for Romero. He broke off communications with his friend President Molina, and from that point on refused to attend official government functions. He had long had a

reputation as a gripping preacher, and now his Sunday homilies in the cathedral gained world-wide attention for their combination of accurate reporting of events in the country and theological interpretation. In El Salvador they were broadcast by the diocesan radio station YSAX, and listened to eagerly in rural communities across the country, and of course by the military and politicians. Fr Thomas Greenan, who worked in El Salvador and has studied Romero's homilies in detail, has described how Romero prepared them in a 'homily advisory breakfast':

Archbishop Romero met with several people before writing his Sunday homily. Among them was his Vicar General, Ricardo Urioste, Roberto Cuellar of the Legal Aid Office and the Mexican Jesuit Rafael Moreno, who presented an analysis of the country's political situation... Nevertheless the final preparation of the homilies each Sunday and the final exposition was Romero's alone.

In view of the objections raised against Romero's beatification on the grounds that he was more politician than priest, it is interesting to find that the theology of the homilies is mainline Catholic theology – not surprising in someone who did his theology in Rome at the end of the 1930s – but with an ecclesiology taken from Vatican II and a 'social teaching' influenced by the teaching of the Latin American bishops at their meetings in Medellín and Puebla. He frequently refers to the popes, confirming his adherence to his episcopal motto *Sentire cum Ecclesia*, 'Have the mind of the church'.

Romero stresses the incarnation, Christ's identifying of himself with humanity, but neatly gives it a Salvadorean colouring:

If Christ had become incarnate in our time, 1978, he would be a thirty-year old man, a farm-worker from Nazareth, here in this cathedral, like any other farm-worker from our rural communities. He would be the Son of God enfleshed and we would not recognise him: in everything he is just like us.

Christ is a man of flesh and blood, of nerves and muscles, like us. A man who feels what anyone feels when the Civil Guard arrests him and takes him to the place of torture. Christ also was tortured; Christ also

was executed unjustly.

He insists on his orthodoxy:

Let's not give the impression of being two Churches, because we are only one Church, in line with the magisterium of that Church, especially for our time with the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín documents.

Another constant theme is that the church must be concerned with secular issues:

Keep a careful eye on all those who say that the Church ought to keep to the sacristy and not start proclaiming the duties of justice and insisting on humanity's human rights, Christians who, under the pretext that here we have no permanent abode, say we should look to the future, those who consider that they can ignore temporal tasks, without realising that faith itself is a force that obliges them to carry out those tasks as well as possible in accordance with each person's calling.

As tension grew in El Salvador, Romero's criticisms of the oligarchy sharpened:

Those who call themselves Catholic and idolise wealth and have no desire to detach themselves from their wealth – such people are not Christian. They have not understood the Lord's call and this is not the Church.

And:

I am simply the shepherd, the brother, the friend of this people, who knows its sufferings, its hunger, its anguish; in the name of these I raise my own voice to say: Don't worship your riches like an idol. Don't protect them in a way that leaves others to die of hunger...

Nonetheless Romero maintained his insistence that the church stood for principle, not party:

We repeat once again that with regard to political systems and organisation the Church does not identify herself with any specific political option but supports that which is just in all political options but also denounces those situations that are unjust.

In October 1979 he neatly turned the charge of bias back on the government:

The political crisis is based on a confrontation between the people and the government. We have said the same thing on many occasions. When we have been asked about the conflicts with the Church we have said: 'The Church is not against the government, but rather the government is against the people. The Church desires to be with the people and because of this, the Church is persecuted.'

While not supporting violence, he increasingly saw it as inevitable:

There is injustice, an institutionalised violence, a frenzy to retain power, to maintain control of the economy, and they are capable, in this desire to maintain their position, of crushing human lives and society as a whole. This is violence, institutionalised violence. It is no surprise that there should be a violent reaction.

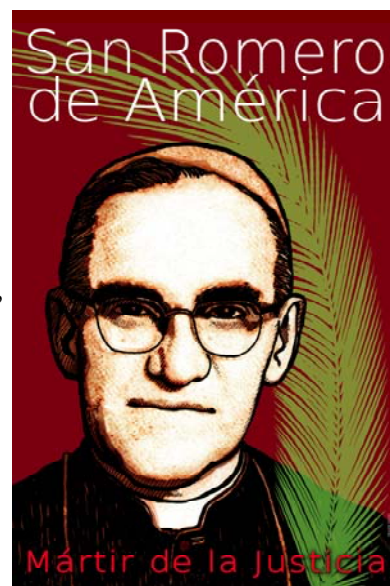
And the day before he was murdered, he delivered the homily that probably sealed his fate, with a call to the ordinary soldiers to disobey unjust orders:

Brothers, you are part of our own people, and you are killing your own brothers and sisters from the rural areas. Against any order to kill given by a human being, God's law must prevail: Thou shalt not kill! No soldier is obliged to obey an order that is against the law of God... In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people, whose tears rise to heaven with more force each day, I beg you, I ask you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression!

## His cause in Rome

Archbishop Romero had been supported by none of the other Salvadorean bishops except his auxiliary and later successor, Arturo Rivera y Damas. His episcopal enemies had sent hostile briefings on him to the Vatican. This was also the height of the battle within the Roman Catholic Church over liberation theology: Cardinal Ratzinger's negative assessment, *Libertatis nuntius*, was issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1984. Archbishop Rivera y Damas announced the start of the process of beatification with a diocesan investigation in 1990, and the case was submitted to Rome in 1996. As the official in charge of presenting Romero's case, Archbishop

Vincenzo Paglia, admitted in February 2015, once Pope Francis had agreed that Romero could be declared a martyr, his progress to beatification had been held up by 'negative information' sent to Rome. Pope Benedict, apparently, unblocked the process, but, said Paglia, it took a Latin American pope to see it through to completion.



Another important factor, according to Jon Sobrino, liberation theologian and friend and adviser to Romero, had been John Paul II's change of heart, and his insistence on visiting Romero's tomb when he visited El Salvador in 1983, against the wishes of the government. Previously the Polish pope has been critical of what he saw as Romero's involvement in politics. Writing in 1998, Sobrino argued that official recognition is important, but what really matters is that the people have already canonised him, and not as a distant figure, but as one of their own:

The canonisation of Archbishop Romero ... is necessary. A saint is an intercessor, in our favour, interceding with God, in the language of tradition, or in historical language, someone who gives us encouragement, strength, life and hope. And a saint is a model, someone who shows us the way to go, with what the language of tradition calls exemplary virtues or, in historical language, with his life as a complete Salvadorean and Christian.

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A fully referenced version of this article is available from the Editor: [editor@sofn.org.uk](mailto:editor@sofn.org.uk)

The sources for the information contained in the article, including the quotations, are most easily accessed through the website of the Romero Trust: [www.romerotrust.org.uk](http://www.romerotrust.org.uk).

Francis McDonagh writes about Latin America for the *Tablet*. He has edited the *Selected Writings* of Dom Helder Camara in the Modern Spiritual Masters series (Orbis Books, New York 2009).

# Fellow Feeling and Loving Kindness

Penny Mawdsley thinks about fellow feeling in life and literature, including the lack of it in George Eliot's rigidly religious Mr Bulstrode and the kindness of Syrian refugees in the Yorkshire floods.

The personal reflections on Fellow Feeling and Loving Kindness that I'm about to unfold on this 14<sup>th</sup> February 2016 have little connection, if any at all, with the mythical St. Valentine or Santes Dwynwen whose day Welsh lovers celebrate on 25<sup>th</sup> January.

'Fellow feeling' (German; *Mitgefühl*) was a subject of great interest to Max Ferdinand Scheler. Scheler (1874-1928), a recent discovery of mine, was a prolific writer, stimulating thinker and one of the leading members of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy school. He discerned five distinct affective labels for fellow feeling, which he visualised as standing in a strict hierarchy where the higher levels depend on the lower. In his *The Nature of Sympathy*, first published in English some decades after his death, Scheler argued that fellow feeling comes in at number 3, half way between (1) identification (with 'the other'), (2) vicarious feeling (empathy) and (4) benevolence (German: *Menschenliebe*) – humanitarianism or a broad love of mankind – and (5) unselfish love. For Scheler sympathy is basically underwritten by love.

Scheler argued that the character of an individual's entire affective life amounts to the degree of his or her loving engagement with the world. How much sympathy we have is consequent on how deeply we engage with the world with our love. So far, so good. Where do I relate to all this? I find myself somewhat at odds with this exclusively positive spin on 'fellow feeling'. To cut to the chase, the world is, and as far as we can discern always has been, pervaded by propaganda of one kind or another – easy to swallow and generally critically unexamined. It attracts us for being closely associated with some of the many subtle influences to which we have been exposed during our formative years – both positive and negative. Such influences may include some of which we may not be aware, or those fully conscious influences whose hold on

us is so strong that we want stubbornly to retain them, on the one hand, or utterly to reject them on the other.

The close identification of one person with the feelings of others may at best lead to person A behaving with compassion towards person B, but when, persuaded by the power of propaganda, any number from a small crowd of people to a sizeable section of the population develop strong fellow feeling *against* an individual or a vulnerable group of those judged pejoratively to be somehow undesirably 'different', this fellow feeling may become a very ugly, misguided and dangerous thing indeed.

I guess that in any society for all those who have developed an open readiness to both empathise and sympathise with the plight of someone else there are others – probably greater numbers – whose wariness and suspicion holds them back from identifying so readily with the afflicted. From what I know of myself I own to belonging to the cautious latter category. I need to be very strongly convinced that an initial sympathetic response to a horrific news item, for example, should be to follow it up with an appropriately compassionate action. Worse still, I too easily persuade myself that a knee-jerk compassionate response is at best naive – I don't know the other side of the story and I may indeed be making matters worse. Am I just trying to satisfy my *own* conscience by apparently doing the compassionate thing?

Thank heavens there are plenty of people around to model the compassionate response role! It would appear that the only chance for the world to become a better and happier place for us all is to encourage the healthy development of emotional intelligence in our young and to do everything in our power to prevent disillusionment, apathy and the deadening of sensitivity to the feelings of others setting in by the time they reach adult life. Our primary schools are currently working imaginatively to



encourage pupils to develop a greater awareness of and respect for others, going beyond teaching ‘good manners’ to help them learn how to read facial expressions, body language and to use their imaginations to ‘walk in another’s moccasins’. Those like me who are tempted to hold back from becoming involved with the plight of others – for myriad reasons including the fear of being taken for a mug or, worse still, an interfering do-gooder – surely miss not only the heartening experience of feeling that they have made a difference – for the better – but also fail to experience the genuine appreciation of others for kindness given.

It is to be hoped that the warm-hearted Syrian refugees who had been granted safe asylum in Manchester before Christmas have picked up on the huge gratitude of the people of Rochdale for so readily turning out to help residents clean up after the devastating floods over New Year. These refugees, who had clearly suffered a terrible journey as they made their way through Europe to reach Britain, included a certain Yasser al-Jassem, a 35-year-old teacher who had been carried on the back of a lorry from Calais in May. Yasser reported simply: ‘We saw the pictures on TV and wanted to help.’ Another group of seven Syrian immigrants helping with flood prevention in Littleborough were reported as saying that they wanted to give something back to the community that had generously welcomed their arrival.

Not only is it to be hoped that these willing individuals have boosted their self-esteem and felt good to have carried out helpful and essential tasks for members of their host community, but further, felt a surging uplift of hope for this new and challenging chapter in their lives – a valuable ‘resurrection’ after all the upheaval, misery and exceptional endurance of their recent past.

On an unhelpful and worrying note, however, looking at the online comments following the upbeat report of the refugees ‘mucking in’



Syrian refugee Yasser al-Jassem: Photo: Rethink Rebuild Society

alongside the benighted residents – sadly and probably to be expected – there was some negative response to the photo of the men filling the sandbags as part of the flood damage-limitation strategy. A certain ‘George Cross’ pasted:

This pic is a blatant set-up photo-opportunity propaganda... Watch the actual video and it's all white British people doing the work.

Such a response will have boosted the cause of those who are against taking in asylum seekers and it will have undoubtedly encouraged those with that xenophobic version of ‘fellow feeling’ which works so dangerously against all attempts to further and bolster community cohesion.

It often appears that genuine loving kindness is in all too short supply. Those of us who have had the very good fortune to experience it at the receiving end, so to speak, have little excuse not to mete it out generously to others when and wherever we witness a situation for doing so. As I write these words, however, I find my toes curling. Early memories of being told by parents and teachers to ‘count my blessings’ and, more formally, (and to me meaninglessly) to love God (we are *commanded* to do so) – or at least to love the Lord Jesus as a faithful and dependable ‘Friend’ – stick in my craw. These apparent injunctions probably hold me back from many a compassionate or kind action that I might perform.

Shocking to say, and perhaps even more shocking to write, the more I have tried to



Peter Jeffrey as Mr Bulstrode in the BBC *Middlemarch* (1994)

appreciate the attraction of following the rabbi from Nazareth along ‘the Narrow Way’, the more I have been not exactly repelled but not drawn either. However ridiculous, totally unreasonable and completely unjust it may sound (which it clearly is), I find myself put off by the emphasis given in the Gospels to Jesus’ bias to the poor and disadvantaged, the needy and the underdog. Where is the Good News of this undeniably good and compassionate person for the likes of me? While happy to acknowledge that social justice needs to be brought about for all, I don’t like being coerced or cajoled into any action to help bring it about by do-gooders standing on the moral high ground. Perversely, perhaps I am someone who has always felt distinctly uncomfortable in the company of obviously ‘good’ people.

Returning from my anti-social rant to look more at the problem of disconnects between religious doctrine, ethical stance, and genuine compassion for others as well as moral action, it is interesting to note what writers of past and present have contributed in this area. Here is George Eliot’s comment on her *Middlemarch* character Mr Bulstrode’s wicked behaviour (despite his being a rigid and loudly self-proclaimed Christian):

There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow men.

It appears that Eliot does not opt for explaining away Bulstrode’s bad behaviour as hypocrisy but rather, she recognises a universal tendency to understand that religious belief in a ‘general doctrine’ can only go so far and that our morality is dependent on direct fellow feeling or sympathy. Eliot appears to be saying that if we can’t sympathise or feel compassion for ‘individual fellow-men’ then we are unlikely to treat others well whatever our religious beliefs are.

From the realms of well-written, contemporary American fiction, in Kathryn Stockett’s *The Help*, Miss Celia, the needy and inexperienced young woman who is desperate to hide from her husband a total inadequacy as a 1950s American domestic goddess, is ready enough to accept unbounded practical assistance from her perceptive and compassionate domestic help, Minny. Yet, through her background under segregation, she seems immune from recognising Minny for the outstandingly patient, caring and competent individual that she is. Other memorable ‘white’ characters in the novel display similar blindness and an inability to identify with the feelings and plight of those who work for them. Unknowingly, these characters – from both sides of the segregated divide – appear to belong to the Machiavelli and Hobbes school, where the prevailing motivation for action is understood to be fear rather than love.

In contemporary British fiction, for example in Sadie Jones’s *The Outcast*, the central character Lewis rarely receives acts of loving kindness after the tragic death of his mother. What is most disturbing about the narrative, perhaps, is that even the best of the adults in the growing boy’s life fail to pick up on the depth of his bereavement and fail to summon the necessary patience to help him out of it. The father is unable to free himself sufficiently from the weight of his own bereavement to pay proper attention to the needs of his son and he exemplifies such a traditionally stoically ‘British’ attitude towards grief that he is blind to the fact that Lewis is not coping and needs psychiatric help.

The boy’s young stepmother at least makes an effort to befriend Lewis before making the

disastrous attempt to seduce him that destroys not only any trust he has painfully started to build up in her but the affection that has slowly developed between them. In this novel, however, redemption of a sort is achieved in the character of the damaged Kit, abused by her father in childhood but who is eventually able to stir in Lewis a profound desire to protect and love her. The author appears to demonstrate that it is by having experienced love that the individual is capable of developing and showing it to another.

In the delightful 2008 novel, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, set during the Nazi occupation of the island, the characters are brought together in a very moving way. Under the regime of privations caused by the Occupation their fellow feeling develops as a result of a common need to cope and keep up their spirits, and the narrative unfolds an exceptionally humane vision and demonstrates the power of cooperation and single-minded love in survival.

Now that our society has developed so many professional channels of help for people facing severe difficulty in coping with being ‘up against it’ in numerous ways – even if in these austerity times this help is not as freely available as it needs to be – we tend to forget how people managed in the past – and indeed manage today in undeveloped and troubled parts of the world. When there was no trauma counselling or therapy on offer, folk here were usually dependent on various wise and perceptive lay persons, members of extended families living in the vicinity or, if they were lucky, a parish priest with pastoral ability. Those needing help risked being shunned, misunderstood or disbelieved and there was, presumably, a likelihood that their psychological state could end up more troubled than when they originally unburdened themselves.

As the asylum seekers arrive in greater numbers, there will be a huge and overwhelming



Syrian refugees help fill sandbags for flood defences in Rochdale

need for the host countries to provide sustained counselling for the millions of traumatised displaced people seeking sanctuary, in addition to the basic provision of shelter, food and paying occupation for the duration of their stay. Those who make these provisions will need to dispense what is necessary in a manner which will somehow preserve the human dignity of the recipients and not demean them. Whether those hailing from cultures unlike our own who have received loving kindness in the form of charity handouts over a prolonged period will become sensitive to their dependence and feel inadequate, even ashamed, as time goes on remains to be seen.

All we can do is hazard a guess that it is a basic human response to feel uneasy when there is an extended imbalance between giving and receiving. However, as it is likely that many of the current refugees will opt to stay on in Europe if they can find homes and sustainable work in the countries where they have landed up, it is to be hoped that, like those who ‘did their bit’ during the flooding crisis in the New Year, they will fulfil a psychological need and feel a sense of satisfaction – and indeed pride – in contributing to the betterment of life in their local communities as well as feeling valued by their fellow residents.

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Penny Mawdsley is a retired teacher. She is Editor of *Portholes*.

# Theological Reflection

## Religion as a Human Creation

### 2. Death and Resurrection

Dinah Livingstone ponders a classic Christian doctrine.

‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit’ (John 12:23). Jesus says this in his final week in Jerusalem when he is about to be arrested and crucified. For his disciples and friends his death was traumatic. In Luke’s account of the two on the road to Emmaus they tell the stranger on the way: ‘We had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel’ (Luke 24:21). At their journey’s end they invite the stranger to have supper with them. He takes bread, blesses and breaks it and gives it to them. Then ‘they recognised him and he vanished from their sight.’ This is a story of one of a number of sightings of Jesus risen from the dead. The earliest list we have is given by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians (1Cor 15:3), in which he repeatedly uses the term *ὤφθη* (*ophthe*: ‘was seen’), including for his own vision on the Damascus road. The original text of Mark the first gospel, as it appears in both the Codex Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, has no resurrection appearances at all. The disciples had to make sense of Jesus’ execution as a criminal. They became convinced that in some way he was still alive, and came up with fertile and poetic ideas. They created the Christ Epic. They resurrected him as Christ.

Today we often hear people saying they admire the ethics of kindness Jesus taught but all that stuff about Christ the Lord was a later accretion which we can do without. A recent

best-selling novel by Philip Pullman was even called *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*. However, if we regard the *whole* supernatural realm as the creation of the human poetic genius, then the Christ Epic can be seen as an outstanding manifestation of that genius which has certainly been very fruitful. Great art is often created out of trauma, a descent into the

depths of human experience and recapitulating it in the poem (or other work of art). From the trauma of Jesus’ death his followers produced this great cosmic Epic. And the making (*poiesis*) of the Epic mirrored its content. When Jesus died they had gone down into the depths of desolation and disappointment and come up with the Epic, and the Epic itself was of Christ the divine Word going down into the depths of humiliation and death and coming up again, alive and triumphant.



William Blake: *Christ Rising*

The poem or early Christian hymn (Phil 2:6-11) that Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians focuses on the *shape* of the drama. The movement is *down* and then *up* of Christ, one who was ‘in the form of God’, ‘emptying himself’ down to Earth, not only being born as a human child but assuming humanity even in its most painful mortality, death on a Cross, becoming ‘like us in all things...’, a fellow creature. Then this humanity *in Christ* is *highly exalted*. Christ Jesus:

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death –  
even death on a cross.  
Therefore God also highly exalted him...

Ephesians (4:8) gives us a 'christological' gloss  
on Psalm 68:18:

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  
into the lowest parts of the Earth?

In another great poem of the Christ Epic, in  
Colossians, by his death and resurrection Christ  
becomes 'the beginning, the firstborn from the  
dead' (Col.1:18). He is the protagonist, the  
prototype, the namesake hero of a new humanity  
incorporated 'in Christ'. For 'in him all fullness  
was pleased to dwell.'

## Two 'Takes' on the Drama

We can briefly consider a 'take' on this drama  
which now seems alien to many people today  
– the theme of sacrifice, which gives rise to  
cognitive and cultural dissonance in our very  
different world, unless it becomes *self-*  
sacrifice for a noble cause. Then we look at  
another 'take' on the drama – the theme of a  
new humanity in Christ – which remains  
potent and inspiring and turns out to be  
another poetic version of Jesus' proclamation  
of the reign of God coming on Earth with its  
ethic of kindness.

### *Sacrifice*

The Letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus' death  
as perfecting and superseding the Jewish Temple  
cult; with Jesus as both high priest and victim of  
the ultimate sacrifice, able to offer 'satisfaction'  
to God. In the Temple a constant stream of  
animals were ritually killed and indeed animal  
and human sacrifices were prevalent throughout  
the ancient world. However, today many people

find killing people or animals to honour or  
placate a god repugnant, and they are repelled  
and bemused by the idea of Jesus' death as a  
'ransom' paid to God or devil. Recently the  
*Hampstead and Highgate Express* reported that  
a man, whose father had died in the Hampstead  
Royal Free Hospital, came from Kenya to  
sacrifice a ram in the hospital's multi-faith chapel  
to enable his father's spirit to rest in peace. The  
hospital Health and Safety authorities prevented  
him, saying animals were not allowed in the  
chapel except for guide dogs and therapy pets.

That was not how Jesus saw his own death.  
As Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino says in his  
book *Jesus the Liberator*:

Let it be said from the start that the historical  
Jesus did not interpret his death in terms of  
salvation, in terms of the soteriological models  
later developed by the New Testament, such  
as expiatory sacrifice or vicarious satisfaction.

However, *self-sacrifice* by speaking out for a  
good reason and clashing with the powers-that-  
be *can* be seen as what led to Jesus' death and  
the deaths of many who have followed him, for  
example, the recently beatified Archbishop  
Romero (see article p. 4), who was murdered at  
Mass a few days after he preached a sermon in  
his San Salvador cathedral, saying: 'I beg you, I  
beseech you, I order you: Stop the repression!' He  
is one of the twentieth-century martyrs  
whose statues stand above the Great West Door  
of Westminster Abbey. Self-giving out of love or  
fellow feeling for others means living and dying  
generously. 'Greater love has no one than  
this...' Generosity is related to *generate*. Such a  
death can be like the seed that falls into the  
ground, dies and generates much fruit.

### *A New Humanity*

Paul's trauma was his conversion experience. In  
the story in Acts, he hears a voice on the road to  
Damascus: 'Why are you persecuting *me*?' He  
asks: 'Who are you?' The reply is: 'I am Jesus  
whom you are persecuting.' Trauma led to  
insight and in his first letter to the Corinthians (1  
Cor 11:23) Paul recalls that 'the Lord Jesus on  
the night when he was betrayed took bread...  
broke it and said: "This is my body..."' So Paul  
concludes: 'We who are many are one body,  
because we all share the same bread' (1 Cor  
10:17). 'For just as the body is one and has many

members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ' (1 Cor 12:12). Christ is the name for the new liberated humanity. Of course, at the moment we humans do not all share the same bread. Some of us starve and some of us have too much. The Eucharist is a sign that the new humanity has been inaugurated as a project *now* but it has *not yet* fully come about. The Eucharist 'proclaims the Lord's death till he comes'.

Jesus had given a version of the whole of humanity as himself in the story in Matthew's gospel of the judgment of the nations (Mt 25:34). He says to those on his right hand:

I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink... Truly I tell you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters you did it to me.

Though Paul seldom quotes Jesus' actual words, when he is telling the people he is writing to what 'newness of life' in Christ means, he constantly reminds them to behave kindly, gently and with fellow feeling.

In one of his earliest epistles, to the Galatians (reiterated in the later Colossians), Paul declares: 'There is no longer Jew nor Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ' (Gal 3:28). In his book *Inventing the Individual* (reviewed on p. 23) Larry Siedentrop quotes this and points out what a revolutionary idea it was. He argues that this declaration of the moral equality of every human individual kickstarted ideas of humanism and that, contrary to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment view, so fiercely anti-religious particularly in France, 'secularism is the embodiment of Christian moral intuitions'.

Actually, we find that Paul's vision of the new liberated humanity in Christ is more far-reaching than his application of it in some of his instructions to his Christian communities on how to behave (women or slaves, for example). But the vision remains. In the Pauline epistles (whether written by him or members of his 'school') the theme of fullness, fulfilment, recurs constantly. In Ephesians (1:10) God's 'plan for the fullness of time' is to 'recapitulate' (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι: *anakephalaiosasthai*) all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on

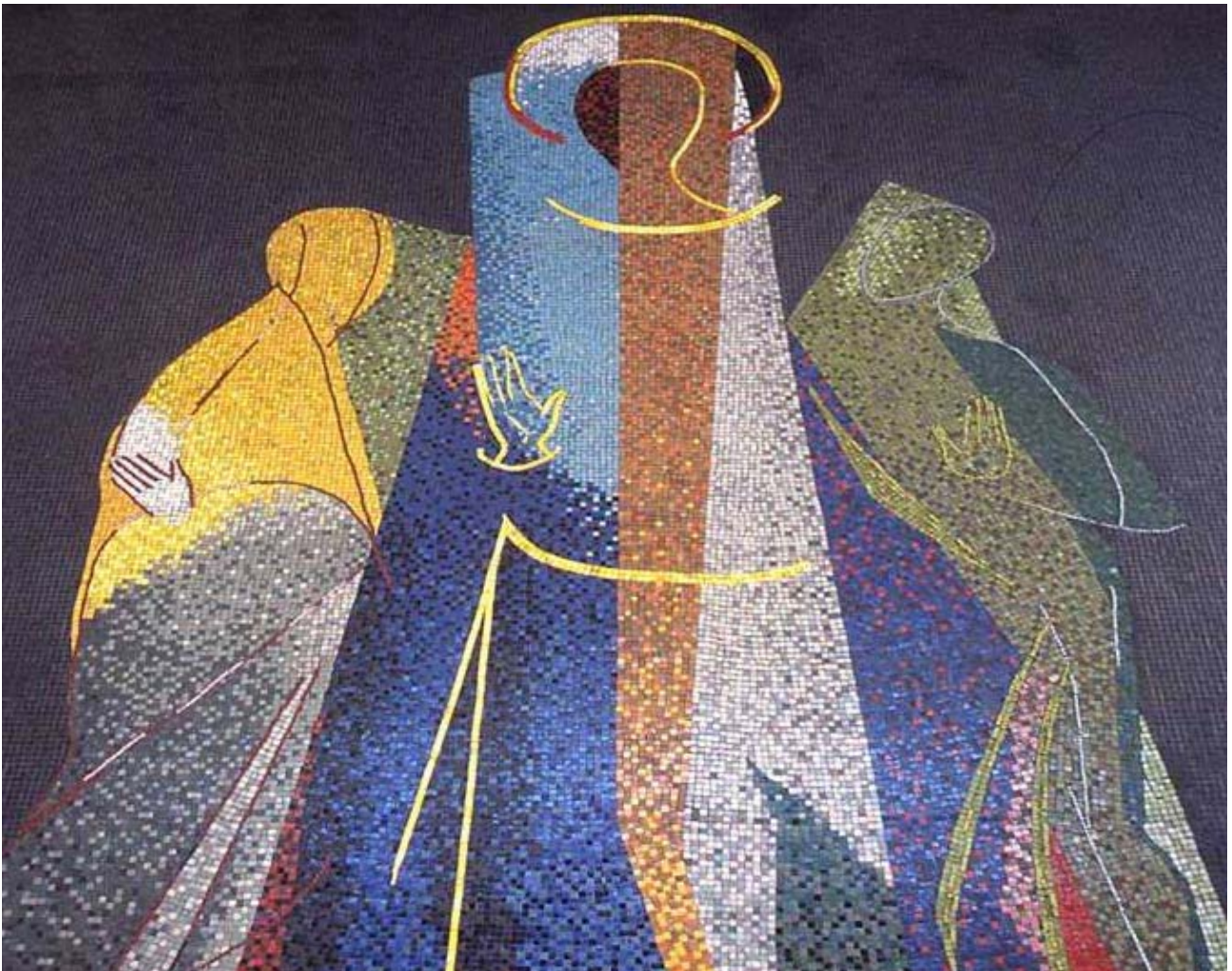
Earth. The new humanity in Christ is 'built together as a dwelling place for God' (2:22) and must grow until we reach 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (4:13) for 'in him the whole fullness of godhead dwells bodily' (Col 2:9) This is an early expression of the full-blown Chalcedon statement that Christ is one person, true God and true man with both a divine and a human mind. As such a person appears to be psychologically impossible, it becomes the tipping point dropping us in it: the realisation that supernatural deities are mythical and 'reside in the human breast'. We have here the poetic creation of an epic hero whose mysterious being is an immensely rich imaginative paradox and the seed of humanism.

Jesus dies like the grain of wheat falling into the earth and producing 'much fruit'. Christ Jesus rises as a new humanity aspiring to 'the whole fullness'. The fruit, the fulfilment, is a sane and kindly humanism. The risen Christ is the 'first fruits', an 'earnest' of that fulfilment, the protagonist, the leading idea, the risen Word. As usual the human poetic genius gets there first, here with the Christ Epic. The risen Christ becomes the *project* of a kind humanity, one body all sharing the same bread, our common treasury. This has inspired many struggles, both personal and political, but 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' has not yet been fully achieved. It is another version – vision – of what Jesus himself preached, the reign of God coming on Earth. But as there is no supernatural being to bring it about we have to keep on trying to do it ourselves.

## The Rising Up of Christ

We have space here only to mention two examples when the Christ Epic inspired people to struggle for a better world.

In the English Revolution of 1649 the Diggers occupied land on St George's Hill in Surrey to grow food on it. Their purpose, said their spokesman Gerrard Winstanley, was to 'lay the foundation of making the Earth a Common Treasury for all'. In his tract *The New Law of Righteousness*, published in the same year, Winstanley describes this action as 'the rising up of Christ in sons and daughters'. He develops this theology in copious other writings.



John Piper: *The Risen Christ at Emmaus*. Mosaic 1961. St Paul's Church, Harlow

Twentieth century liberation theology holds that Christ is to be found today first and foremost in 'the crucified people', those who suffer oppression, injustice or great hardship. This theology inspired the *Peasant Mass* of the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979. Just as the Diggers had spoken of their action as 'the rising up of Christ in sons and daughters', the creed of the *Misa campesina* identifies the suffering people with the crucified Christ, and their struggle for a better life with his resurrection:

I trust in you, comrade,  
 human Christ, Christ the worker,  
 death you've overcome.  
 Your fearful suffering  
 formed the new humanity  
 born for freedom.  
 You are rising now  
 each time we raise an arm  
 to defend the people  
 from profiteering dominion,  
 because you're living on the farm,  
 in the factory and in school;

Your struggle carries on,  
 I trust in your resurrection.

## Ongoing

People keep struggling for a kinder world. There are some advances and many disappointments. One gain, frequently cited by Don Cupitt, is the National Health Service. But when Gandhi was asked what he thought of Western civilisation, he replied: 'It would be a good idea.' We still have a long way to go.

And in our personal lives we may suffer difficulties, pain and sorrow and try to get up and go on, or fall short of what we should like to be and do and resolve to 'turn over a new leaf', or feel ashamed and have a change of heart. Night-fall and sleep then waking in the morning to a new day is like a little death and resurrection. Christ's descent to the depths, then rising again high above thrones, dominations, principalities and powers is an Epic about ourselves whose outcome is ongoing.

# SOF Sift

A column in which Network members think out loud about SOF and their own quest.

*Margaret Driver*  
*London*

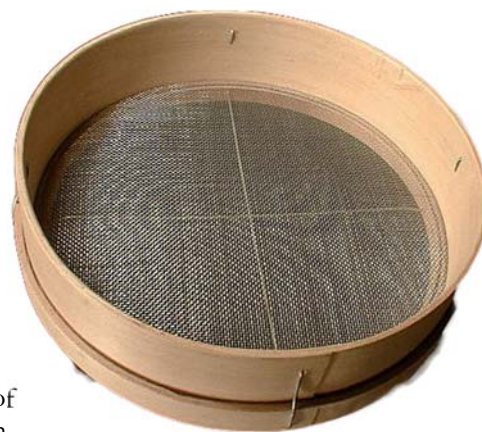
I have never quite understood why my journey from a solid Christian upbringing ended in a mid-life loss of faith for no particular reason.

It started in India where I lived until I was 12 with a railway engineer father and a doctor mother. Both came from staunch Congregational backgrounds. My school in Kodaikanal, 7000 feet up in the Palni Hills in the far South of India, was founded for the children of American missionaries, largely Lutheran and Baptist. Sunday services were straight up and down nonconformist 'hymn sandwiches' and I sometimes used to play for the hymns. My most vivid memory is of roaming the hills to search for the wild, sweet-smelling Madonna lilies to decorate the school hall at Easter. And often I would be woken in the dark on Easter Day by the haunting sound of 'Jesus Christ is risen today' echoing round the higher hills as the school staff wound their way along the four mile circuit of Kodai Lake.

When we returned to England I attended a rather more restrictive school for the daughters of non-conformist missionaries. In spite of plenty of chances to think and discuss religious beliefs, both at home and school, I had few doubts; I still just accepted that there was a loving God who would look after me, provided I was suitably penitent and accepted forgiveness. So I joined the Presbyterian church at 16.

Oxford University, the home of high Anglicanism, was a sudden shock of alien culture with to me unbelievable doctrines and weird rituals. I took refuge in what seemed the sane and rational environment of the Student Christian Movement, then very active. But most of all there was an introduction to the large Bach choir. Singing the Bach B minor Mass for the first time in the Sheldonian theatre I had to stand on a chair at the back of the altos and nearly fell off with excitement in the dramatic silence between '*et sepultus est*' and '*et resurrexit*'.

My husband Christopher came from an even more firmly grounded Congregational background. We joined the then Presbyterian church in Highgate, now the United Reformed Church. There George Corfield, an inspirational Scottish minister of great integrity, expressed in his sermons the many doubts we were suspecting in ourselves but not yet voicing. So the



bombshell of Bishop John Robinson's *Honest to God* didn't exactly blow belief apart but made me realise that my so-called faith was only an empty shell (rather like the contents of an egg that had been neatly sucked out through a pinprick-sized hole with no sign of damage, by a mongoose in our garden hedge in Madras). Then I found my local SOF group and the *Sofia* magazine that provided me with like-minded friends and the intellectual stimulation I needed.

Through all these wanderings my mother remained a strong influence. She had a scientific mind but was deeply religious. She taught me to believe that human nature needed something stronger than itself to change its faulty behaviour and she was saddened when I could no longer believe in this help. I wished I could, because I have been left with a large gap, not just how to cope with non-belief, but how to worship when conventional church services seem impossible.

Working to help those less fortunate is one way and I suppose that is what I chose as a social worker and can still continue by doing bereavement counselling. Meditation is another and has been a new discovery: I am very much a beginner with the help of a meditation group led by a wise woman in the URC. As Laurence Freeman says, what concentrates our attention in a selfless way, whether it be walking, music or art, can be a form of prayer. The fruit of all prayer is a calmer mind and a more open and compassionate heart. I find the aim to live in the present moment very difficult except when I am involved with music.

The marvels of choral music, much of it written for the Church, have rejoiced me ever since that first B minor Mass. In the company of the London Philharmonic choir and a smaller choir, the English Chamber Choir, I have sung Masses, Requiems, *Magnificats* and more from Bach and Byzantine to Brahms, Monteverdi and Mahler to Macmillan, under the direction of amazing conductors. It was Christopher who introduced me to my other love, chamber music, first just to listen and then to play my viola with friends. This is my way to praise and give thanks for life.



# Self and Others

Bobbie Stephens-Wright says real sympathy requires a strong sense of self and describes her struggle to achieve one.

The state of having a self can be comfortably assumed by most human beings unless one has experienced the state known as depersonalisation, a very strange and uncomfortable state where one actually begins to feel as if one is in a dream and that perhaps neither oneself nor the world is actually real.

It must be admitted that for the earlier part of my life I was in the comfortable position of believing that I had a self and I certainly would have subscribed to the idea that there was such a thing as a core self. Then at a difficult period in my life I began to suffer from what was described to me as depersonalisation. The initial relief from this psychological disposition came in the form of being directed to a little book entitled *Home is Where We Start From* by the late analyst D.W. Winnicott.

It became obvious from reading this book that the feelings I was experiencing were understood by Winnicott and others, and that I was not entirely alone or the freak that I felt myself to be. There was even the strange perverse comfort that the feeling of the 'self' I had always been before was, perhaps, not the secure psychological position that I had previously thought. In this regard Winnicott wrote: 'No doubt the vast majority of people take feeling real for granted, but at what cost? To what extent are they denying a fact, namely, that there could be a danger for them of feeling unreal, possessed, of feeling they are not themselves, of falling forever, of having no orientation, of being nothing, nowhere?' (Winnicott: 1986: 35) It was Winnicott's contention that being and feeling real belonged to individuals who were psychologically healthy and that only if we could take these for granted could we get on to the more positive things in life.

Let me explain to the reader that I was not regarded as having any particular mental illness. I

was gainfully employed in a responsible job where I found myself managing an office of young people. To all intents and purposes I was, to the external world, functioning normally.

I had visited my G.P. and attempted to convey to him that something was very wrong. He duly pointed out that I was managing to work and lacked the appearance of a depressed person. I told him that this was much worse than a simple depression because my life had no meaning and that I cared not if I lived or died. This forced his hand and he sent me, as an outpatient, to an NHS psychiatrist. As I attempted to convey the problem to the psychiatrist she tapped impatiently on her prescription pad and informed me that I was suffering from endogenous depression. That is, that the depression was simply due to a chemical imbalance and nothing to do with any psycho/social factors. She wrote the prescription and passed it over the desk. What possessed me at that moment I know not, but I tore it up and passed it back to her in pieces. I told her that I had obviously been directed to the wrong person and that I would need to find the right person. I left the room assuring her that I would never need to see her again.

The following year, I visited a hypnotherapist, who eventually became a lifelong friend. He tried to help me find a way to arrest the pain of a chronic illness which had robbed me of my sleep for many years. After a number of sessions no progress had been made whatsoever. My friend then told me that he would try a final technique. He would assist me, as usual, to reach the trance state that is an accepted feature of self-hypnosis. One evening, at the end of our session, which was to prove the penultimate, he would count me back out of the altered state and as usual, I would put on my coat to leave then, on reaching the door, I would suddenly remember that I had to write something on the notepad he had



conveniently left on his desk. I picked up the pen and wrote, 'I think I am an illusion and the rest of the world may be an illusion too.' I had absolutely no idea why I wrote this as an answer to chronic pain and neither had he.

The following week I was asked if I could remember what I had written and I said yes and was told that I had written a parable about myself in which he could help me no further. I had no idea how to proceed. The search for help continued and culminated in an association with a psychoanalyst who was living and working in Germany. The analyst wanted to be my friend to better understand my psychological disposition, but it is difficult to be someone's friend and also their analyst. The additional difficulty was that as my analyst resided in Hamburg, our meetings were infrequent and she helped me initially by directing me to the work by Winnicott. Then I was able to follow a path which would lead me out of what was described by psychologist Peter Breggin as a psycho-spiritual crisis rather than an illness caused by chemical imbalance (Breggin: 1993: 120).

By this moment all those with professional qualifications in psychology or analysis will be aware that the described disorder bears the hallmarks of a narcissistic personality disorder, often categorised as a Borderline Personality Disorder or BPD. Of course Freud was quite damning about such a personality but his followers have, fortunately, been rather less so. Among these is the analyst Neville Symington. Symington noted

that each of us is faced by various crises in life and that many of us will successfully draw upon something within to survive and win through. By contrast he believes that the essence of narcissism lies in an emotional refusal. Being emotional, this refusal lies at the bedrock of the personality, and therefore permeates all the decisions and action patterns of a lifetime. Symington remarks that if there is a deep emotional refusal in the face of a crisis, the person never meets the crisis and is crushed by it, rather than being able to surmount it.

By now I think that I was rather fortunate to realise that I was disordered, despite the horrible symptoms. I believe we are all capable of being narcissistic but it would seem that there is quite a difference between knowing about it with some modicum of self-awareness, and being blithely unaware of it. The fact that my symptoms were so extreme prompted me to seek the help that I urgently required. Indeed, Breggin contended that what he described as psychological and spiritual crises, are better seen as opportunities; they offer hope for personal growth.

The inability to process the emotions associated with trauma can lead to a person not being centred and having, at best, an intermittent sense of self. Significantly, Winnicott wrote that in order to *do* (act in the world), one must first *be*. Otherwise, rather than acting effectively in the world the question is 'Who am I?' Appearances can be very deceptive and although it may appear that someone is functioning as well as the next person, depersonalisation means that the person is not living life to its full potential, that they are not really engaging properly in relationships with others. It reminds me of the comparison between what I would term religiosity, the outward show of being religious or pious, and a deeply felt spirituality where someone is concerned with supporting and helping others through positive action. There may be an ability to give lip service to action but, probably no more than that, so great is the concern with 'the self' or the perceived lack thereof.

My emphasis was laid on how I appeared in the world; what I actually materially acquired had to serve as the yardstick of my sense of self-esteem. The list just grew and grew house, cars, caravans and even a time-share. None of this would give me the comfort I was seeking, which

could only emerge through the acquisition of an authentic self. That is not the false self which Winnicott spoke of; the public persona, but rather the fully human person. Not the respectable middle class lady who had made it in the material world but the human being who had been hurt and also inflicted hurt.

In order to 'be' the first move may be, and was, under advice, to try and recall any trauma if I could. It would appear that such traumas will only be remembered when an individual is ready and prepared to remember. A first easy stage of therapy is fairly comfortably to remember the injuries that the world has inflicted upon you as an individual, where you could consider yourself to be the victim. Then there is the need to follow this with the far less comfortable process of looking at your role of being the perpetrator of hurt on the journey through life. Harsh words were often spoken, as my analyst and friend introduced me to my significant negative attributes. I fought every step of the way and defended myself robustly. This is known in

psychoanalytic parlance as 'resistance'. How she stayed with me as friend I have no idea. At any point it might well have been otherwise. Through this long and painful process of introspection and self-reflection I found myself, frail and flawed, but an authentic human being at last. There is no longer the feeling of 'not being real' and no need to ask the ridiculous question 'Who am I?'. I have no idea how I ever had time to ask such a question.

Strong concern with the self does not permit effective and selfless action in the world because the self will simply seek self-reward and aggrandisement. I must thank Penny Mawdsley for providing me with some thoughts on the late and great Erich Fromm. Describing the ability to give and receive love as dependent on one's own sense of happiness and joyful engagement, the article moves 'into more controversial territory'. Fromm points to the distortions which can ensue when the conditions of self-love and self-acceptance are not met: the parent who sacrifices everything for their children, the spouse



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Graffiti tribute to Roger Lloyd Pack as Trigger which appeared in Brighton shortly after his death.

who ‘does not want anything for him/herself’, the person who ‘lives only for the other’. Such expressions of unselfishness, as he sees it, often mask intensive self-centredness and a chronic hostility to life, which paralyses one’s ability to love self or others. I can see perfectly well why this territory would be considered controversial, but surely it prevails upon us to have self-awareness, to adhere to the ancient Socratic dictum ‘Know thyself’.

Because I do not speak the language of the renowned academic disciplines of the mind, I have been obliged to convey the above in my own words, thankfully driven by the emotions that I can at last feel and process without recourse to dissociation. Winnicott remarked that psychological health could never result from denial. The denial of sadness and fear enables the person to project an image of independence, courage and strength. This image is a façade and is impotent. It has no real force, for that lies in the strength of the feelings of any individual. Perhaps David Hume was right to claim that

man was driven by passions, or in more contemporary language, emotions (rather than reason) and ought always to be.

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Bobbie Stephens-Wright is a long-time member of SOF. She is currently working on prison reform. She lives in Morpeth, Northumberland.

## Sixteen Sunsets

Sixteen sunsets in one day  
Can be seen from a space ship  
Orbiting the earth  
But I saw my world crack and slip away

When the consultant  
Sat down by your bed  
And sketched a diagram  
Of your liver and pancreas

When he circled round and round  
With his ball point pen  
Over the little tubes and routes  
Shading in the background  
With fast strokes

Then I felt a sea change  
In the atmosphere  
As gravity sucked at our boots  
And a change of gear

Outside the big window  
Where the chestnut tree  
Held up daylight candles  
On a chandelier

To light the way for  
The lorry of death  
That was drawing near  
Up the quiet road  
Where people walked

Jehane Markham

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Title poem from *Sixteen Sunsets*, CD released January 23, 2016. Words/Music: Jehane Markham /Hartley Lloyd Pack. Jehane Markham's husband, actor Roger Lloyd Pack, died of cancer in 2014. His most famous role was Trigger in the BBC sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*. Jehane and their son Hartley Lloyd Pack made the CD as a tribute to him. It is available from: [sixteensunsets.bandcamp.com/releases](http://sixteensunsets.bandcamp.com/releases). Profits go to Pancreatic Cancer UK.

*Sofia* welcomes comment and debate.  
Please send your letters to:



*Sofia* Editor:  
**Dinah Livingstone,**  
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[editor@sofn.org.uk](mailto:editor@sofn.org.uk)

## Christmas 2015 *Sofia*

This is just to say how much I admire your choice of front and back cover images for the Christmas edition of *Sofia*. I particularly appreciate your having found two pictures with almost identical styles and even fabrics of headscarf. The juxtaposition of pictures like this says so much more than words.

Katy Jennison  
Witney

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## Humanism and Christianity

I thought you might be interested in a letter that appeared in the *Independent* on December 22 [2015]. Though I didn't actually mention SOF it was very much at the front of my mind qua Humanism and was inspired by the latest *Sofia*:

*Dear Sir,*  
*Your editorial on the interesting appointment of Shappi Khorsandi as the new president to the British Humanist Association presents her as a 'Voice for the Godless'. In fact the truth is more subtle. Humanism, and the modern secular state in which it flourishes, is not so much an alternative to religion as the consequence of one particular religion: Christianity.*

*This religion has been called 'the religion of the exit from religion' because for centuries it has been incubating a transformation of our understanding of the world and belief. Not only has this been the matrix of our scientific/secular understanding of the world but, perhaps more important, it has affirmed the significance of the individual moral agent with rights in law (the Magna Carta is an early example), giving rise to a humanitarian ethic. As part of this process 'God' is understood to be not only expressed in human form – the Christmas story – but the product of humanity's poetic consciousness and symbol of the ultimate values we hold.*

*It is this 'post-Christian' space that the majority of people in this country now occupy, even if they are not sure how they came to be there or how to describe it. It is also prophetic, 'a voice in the wilderness', as it points to the future for all belief systems.*

Dominic Kirkham  
Manchester

Edward Walker reviews

## *Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service*

by Alastair McIntosh and Matt  
Carmichael

Green Books (Cambridge 2016). Hbk. 224 pages.  
£18..94.

‘Direct political action is not something to be looked for from a creative artist. The creative artist will contribute in his own way. Though practical action is of course necessary, so also is the inspiration that no-one but a poet can give.’ So wrote the priest-poet R.S. Thomas in his *Autobiographies*; and it was these words that I found I kept on thinking about as I read *Spiritual Activism*. Is everyone a potential Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, an Aung San Suu Kyi? It is not a question the authors address, and I suspect that it is unanswerable. Everyone reading this excellent book, however, will be left pondering the relation between spirituality (as they understand it) and engagement with the harsh realities of the world in which they live.

The first thing that needs to be said about the book is that it not a harangue. Both authors show a gentleness, one can say a compassion, that makes their writing appealing. It is deep, too, ranging widely through the thought of Jung (among others) and reflecting on insights from Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. One and a half centuries after his death, how Chief Seattle would have embraced this book, revealing as it does the sympathy and profound insight into humankind’s relation to the earth which his people had kept in their soul from the beginning and the white colonisers had forgotten. So the authors lead us to consider the ‘left hemisphere dominance’ of Western culture, and its need to reconnect with the deep wisdom of the soul.

*Spiritual Activism* is divided into ten chapters, each one about twenty pages long and ending with a ‘case study’. Gandhi and Tutu, understandably, provide subjects for two of these case studies, but it is good to be introduced to others less well-known like Mama Efua from Ghana and Isabella Baumfree, who managed to escape from slavery in New York at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and later assumed the name of Sojourner Truth. Each chapter could be the basis for fruitful discussion in a book group. Chapter headings such as ‘The Structure of the Psyche’, ‘Nonviolence and the Powers that Be’, ‘The Psychodynamics of Campaigning’ and ‘Tools for Discernment’ indicate the kind of areas covered.

An attractive feature of the book is the sense of humour of its authors which pervades it and is found not only in the text but in the delightful cartoons drawn by Matt Carmichael. In

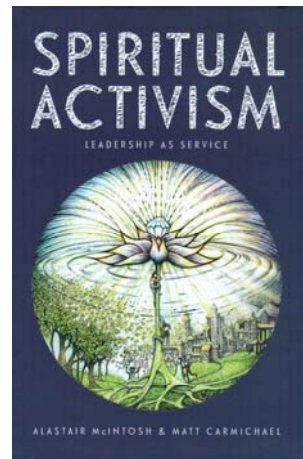
any kind of activism there is a need for psychological honesty. ‘We are reminded of a newspaper cartoon that showed a procession of placard-bearing protesters. “Save the Whales,” read one. “Stop Logging,” said the second. “Down with the Corporation,” another. Finally, right at the end of the line, “I hate my Dad!”’ This kind of self-awareness, involving ‘the gradual shift from being egocentric towards becoming a more centred self is... an essential process to sustain and endure the vicissitudes of activist life.’

Surprising, perhaps, to those of a religious cast of mind, is the inclusion of the rock band Pussy Riot’s protest in Moscow Cathedral in 2012. Three of the young women were prosecuted by the state for an act of ‘hooliganism’, and no doubt most churchgoers in Moscow and beyond will have thought: ‘And quite right too.’ For the authors of *Spiritual Activism*, on the other hand, it was an act of prophetic protest against the collusion of the Church with a repressive state. ‘Pussy Riot’s protest was not to reject the Church, but to reclaim it for the people.’

What, then of R.S. Thomas’ reflection on the role of the creative artist and that of the political activist? Martha and Mary? There is the extrovert and the introvert, and we are all somewhere on the spectrum between the two extremes; no doubt those at the extrovert end of the spectrum will be more drawn to spiritual activism than those at the other end. *Spiritual Activism*, however, is not a book only for extroverts; it is for all who are struggling to live a life which tries to hold together body and soul, prayer and politics: a life of integrity.

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Edward Walker was an Anglican minister for 18 years, five of which he spent in apartheid South Africa. After returning to Britain he resigned from the ministry and became an RE teacher in schools and colleges. His book *Treasure beneath the Hearth* was published in 2015 (Christian Alternative, Winchester).



reviews

Dominic Kirkham reviews  
*Inventing the Individual*  
*The Origins of Western Liberalism*

By Larry Siedentop

Penguin (London 2015). PBk. 434 page. £9.99.

It's the packaging that sells the product, or so they say. This was certainly true with regard to this book as far as I am concerned. Even before I considered buying it, the face of Jan de Leeuw, whose portrait appears on the cover, came to haunt me. I became mesmerised by the penetrating yet gnostic stare of this 'medieval' face, which is also so unmistakably modern.

Cleverly, the cover designer does not show us all the face of this portrait from 1436 by Jan van Eyck. Rather, it seems to be emerging from the blackness of the background, moving into full view. But from where? What were his origins, who exactly was this individual, what was his destiny? In fact these are exactly the questions this book sets out to answer – not just about this individual, poised and waiting to engage in a conversation about identity and origins, but the 'individualism' which he encapsulated.

Larry Siedentop – a distinguished Oxford historian of ideas – tells us that the word 'individual' appeared in France and England in the fourteenth century, just before de Leeuw's era. The appearance of a new word, like the appearance of a heavenly body to astrologers of old, is surely indicative of a new reality. As Siedentop writes of this period, 'The identity of the individual – of a status which creates a space for the legitimate exercise of personal judgement and will – had broken through the surface of social life by the fifteenth century.'

But why at this particular time? Siedentop's central contention is that it is the result of the cumulative influence of Christianity, with its emphasis on the individual as a moral agent. Also as a perhaps unintended consequence of the work of medieval canon lawyers, who developed a legal system based on the assumption of moral equality: 'By the twelfth century a sense of *jus* (justice) was emerging that was not far removed from the modern sense of a right.'

The challenging thesis of Siedentop is that this profound moral and intellectual development preceded the conventional view that the emergence of individual human rights was a result of new Renaissance attitudes and the post-Reformation attempts to resolve religious disputes during the Enlightenment. This latter narrative, he contends, was largely driven by anti-clericalism which wilfully diminished the preceding contribution of the church and Christianity. His challenge is in claiming that, 'Christian moral beliefs emerge as the ultimate source of the social revolution

that made the West what it is.'

Siedentop pursues his thesis with great erudition, but what drives him is not just academic interest but that 'the perception of a profound conflict between secularism and religious belief has been

reawakened' in our time, polarising societies (notably the USA) with the destructive potentiality of a new 'civil war'. This, he contends, is the result of a wilful misreading of history that fails to grasp that secularism emerged from Christianity, is a unique consequence of Christian beliefs, and that: 'Secularism is Christianity's gift to the world.'

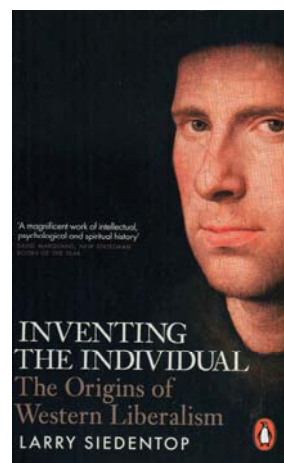
This is a challenging view, which one might first be tempted either to dismiss or diminish. But Siedentop makes an analogy for his attempt to root the language of rights and modern political discourse in medieval innovations in canon law to the origins of modern science in Aristotelian physical theory in the medieval universities. His analogy is perhaps more telling than he thinks. Though modern science did indeed arise from these roots, it was only when it set aside biblical paradigms of thought that real progress became possible.

In the fifteenth century profound social changes led to a radically new understanding of the 'ontological status' of man, which was to express itself first in the traumatic search for justification that catalysed the Reformation, and then the search for an alternative moral order grounded on individual rights that constituted the Enlightenment. It was only with the crumbling of belief in a God-ordained order in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that a new understanding of humanity emerged which was truly inclusive, secular and modern.

Clearly, for whatever reasons, in the times that Jan de Leeuw lived a fundamental change was under way that redefined our understanding of humanity, a change we are still struggling to understand and the ramifications of which much of the world still cannot come to terms with. Siedentop has made a valuable and timely reappraisal of the roots of this drama in a book which is beautifully written and a pleasure to read.

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Dominic Kirkham's book *From Monk to Modernity* was published by SOF in 2015.



Michael Morton reviews

## *Faith and Joy:*

### *Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest*

By Fernando Cardenal SJ

Orbis Books (New York 2015). Pbk. 254 pages. £19.99.

In 1985, at the height of the Thatcher government the then Solicitor General, Nicholas Fairbairn reiterated the old chestnut that the Church should leave alone what is material, political and confine itself solely to the spiritual sphere. However, during the same period, in Latin America, the most publicised aspect of Catholicism was liberation theology which sought to transform Catholic activism into a radical political force operating from 'base communities' and advocating, in some cases, the need for violence to overthrow oppressive governments. And from Nicaragua came the story of four Catholic priests who held ministerial office in the Sandinista government and refused to obey orders from their bishops to return to their pastoral duties.

One of these priests was a Jesuit, Fr Fernando Cardenal, who began his political career in the Sandinista National Liberation Front's (FSLN's) national literacy crusade, eventually rising to become the Minister of Education. He was expelled from the Society of Jesus but when he later broke with the Sandinistas he was reinstated. This book is his story of those years.

The background to the rise of the FSLN Government, the participation of several priests, including Fernando's brother Ernesto, and the largely disastrous interventions by both the USA-funded *contras* and Pope John Paul II is told in an illuminating preface written by Fr Peter Marchetti SJ, a US Jesuit who was invited by the FSLN to help with land reform. Then Fr Cardenal tells of his journey, from the rarefied air of the Jesuits' tertian-ship, where the young student priests lived among, but had no contact with, the people of the country, to his inspiration by the 'preferential option for the poor'. Meanwhile the FSLN rose to power after an earthquake almost destroyed the capital city Managua in 1972. The Somoza dictatorship appropriated to private accounts the aid sent to rebuild the city whilst the youth joined the Sandinistas and called for revolution. The FSLN took power in July 1979 after Somoza was overthrown and fled, and won elections held in 1984. These bare facts are filled out in great detail in Fr Cardenal's memoir – the fear, the hiding, the political machinations as the Somoza dynasty began to realise the game was up for them.

It was a time of near-chaos and great danger for anyone who openly supported the FSLN.

Once in power, the new government was determined to end the very low level of literacy in Nicaragua and embarked on a nationwide literacy campaign. It was here that Fr Cardenal became involved and from early in 1980 a huge task force was sent into the countryside to teach the people to read and write. It proved a great success – the literacy rate in Nicaragua rose from around 20% to over 70%. Fr Cardenal was given the post of Minister of Education.

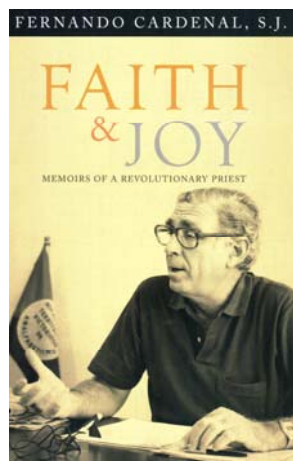
But there were dark clouds on the horizon. The revolutionary government, initially supported by President Jimmy Carter, was regarded askance both by the Reagan administration in the USA and the new Pope, John Paul II. The US illegally funded an alliance of rebels (the *contras*) to overthrow the FSLN, while the Catholic Church made strong protests about the presence of serving priests in the regime. To his great dismay, Fr Cardenal was expelled from the Society of Jesus but in 1995 he broke with the Sandinistas because of what he saw as the corruption of some of the party leaders. Eventually, in 2004 he was reinstated into the Jesuits and continued his work promoting literacy and education under the aegis of a movement called *Fe y Alegría* (Faith and Joy). Hence the title of the book.

This moving story also underlines questions about faith and politics. The flaw in an interpretation of the bible from a left-wing point of view is that it is equally possible to interpret it from a right-wing point of view as well. Moreover, nothing in the modern history of the church inclines you to trust the judgement of the priest in politics. Politics is a place to look for common action, revolution, utopias and police states. But it does not solve religious questions. Mr Fairbairn's principle has still not been resolved.

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Michael Morton is the parish priest of St Winefride's Catholic Church, Sandbach, Cheshire.

Fernando Cardenal died on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2016.



reviews



Kathryn Southworth reviews

*The Day after Always:  
New and Selected Poems*

By Angela Kirby

Shoestring Press (Nottingham 2015). Pbk. 141 pages.  
£12.

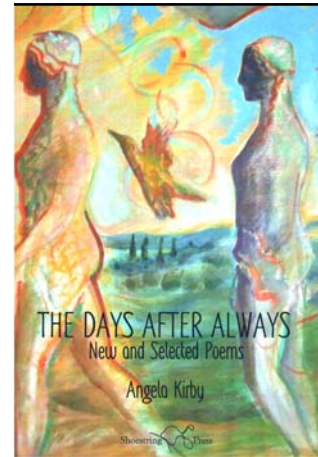
Angela Kirby was born in rural Lancashire in 1932, one of eight children in a Catholic family. She has been a garden designer, chef and journalist, whilst producing fiction, poetry and five children. She also, twice, won BBC Wildlife Poet of the Year. Her emotional range is wide, from jaunty to downbeat, from exuberant to poignant. She inhabits many characters and voices as a story-teller with a deft narrative turn and gift for surprise endings, her language moving easily from liturgical Latin to colloquial and regional English.

Beneath the skill and control of her technique, there is a consistency of theme and emotional resonance which is grounded in her childhood. The title poem embodies this. It evokes through the precise details of Navy Cut cigarettes, proving dough, and the mother singing 'Smoke gets in your eyes', an innocent idyll which seemed set to last forever. Then, 'in the days after' come the emblems of its loss in the Second World War: 'always we wake to sirens, sandbags/and refugees' and to the 'clipped tones' of the wireless announcer: 'Dunkirk, D-Day, Dresden'. The innocent golden past is no sooner evoked than invaded by the pollution of experience. So in 'Threlkell's Bull' the jubilee fete is followed by a father being gored to death by a bull. As the altar boys intone the words of the liturgy, 'to God who gives joy to my youth', the words are undercut by the *Dies Irae* of the dead man's requiem and the poet asks, 'and where now is the joy? Where is it?'

The comforting rhythms of religion and ritual persist through these poems but they are always signs of loss. In 'Black Ice' Our Lady of the Seven Dolours is a relic both for the speaker and the dying woman of their shared lost faith. 'Going Home' is about approaching death: literally, the poet's return home to see her dying father and metaphorically, her revisiting of faith from a humanist perspective. She adopts his language, saying, 'It's time the angels came for you/and oh how I wish your angels now, /the comfort their enfolding wings/might bring' to this 'beloved difficult/old man, my blind and angry father'.

Death is everywhere in this book and faced

directly, sometimes with brutal realism. So, for instance, in the poem on her brother's death, 'David', the speaker watches the monitors at his hospital bedside,



reviews

thinking, 'Forgive me, for I *will* mourn you later, /all that I want right now for both of us/is to be out of here and away'. In 'Mr. Irresistible' she treats the subject with sensuous and grim black comedy. The persistent lover who 'will not take no/for an answer', turns out to be death, the 'only faithful lover'.

Memories persist in language, places and objects. So Kirby recreates her childhood experience of feeding the cows with the call 'Hey oop! Hey oop!' and, in 'Brindle Revisited', although little remains of her childhood home, the very absences recall how it was: 'the Eagle range bakes no more bread', 'slate shelves hold neither cakes nor cream'. Yet the Cumbrian mountains remain and 'the lapwings call and circle still'. Indeed, through change runs a continuity, not only of nature but of memory and family. So in 'Time Machine' the movement of heel and treadle on the gold-scrolled singer recalls at once the poet's mother's mother, whose machine it was, the mother making the poet's first communion dress and her own daughter sewing her wedding dress.

Despite the elegiac overtone, these poems celebrate life and the human body. So In 'Lark Rise at Brancaster' people are 'borne up/in rapture, ferocious bliss' by the larks. In the wry and erotic 'Tying his feet' the poet becomes a type of Leda, swept up by the swan whose smell 'sent me wild', until it becomes a too demanding lover and is summarily trussed up and delivered to the RSPB. Passion is never far away: even the stranger with an unhappy face has breasts so beautiful that someone will kiss her 'down-turned mouth/back into laughter'. In Kirby's poetry passion and laughter redeem us.

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Kathryn Southworth is the former Vice-Principal of Newman University College, Birmingham. She now lives in London in Camden Town.

# As I Please

John Pearson thinks about funerals.

A lot of people, famous people, have been dying recently, and this has set me thinking. Of course, a lot of ordinary people have died too, ordinary in the eyes of the world but most of them special to someone, special for something, and we should not forget them either.

David Bowie recently startled many, his own family included perhaps, by the arrangements he had made for his disposal. It transpired that he had left instructions that his mortal remains should be privately cremated, incinerated without ceremony of any kind, so privately that only he would be there! Was he trying to spare the rest of the family, and the thousands of fans who would doubtlessly have tried to attend, any further grief? Was it recognition that the important bit was over? He was, putting it simply, gone. Bowie's action avoided the stage show that big US funerals and some of those in this country have become in many cases. The great white or gold coffins that we read of in *The American Way of Death*, the immensely expensive bouquets spelling out 'Dad' or here perhaps 'Ziggy'? The ultimate showman, in this case, slipped quietly and humbly away at the end of the show.

Denying the victim a funeral ceremony certainly removes something from the would-be mourners. But what, or who is the funeral for? This last can be a far more complicated question than it may seem at first sight. The cremation, or burial as the case may be, are processes for the disposal of the body. That's what they are for. The service which we attach to the disposal process: who is that for? It is the final 'rite of passage' but what form should the proceedings take? If indeed there are to be any, and it nearly always seems there are. Bowie presented a remarkable exception to the norm.

The funeral, perhaps, is for those who live on and who wish to mark the passing of a friend, a relative, an icon in Bowie's case, in a certain way... stamping the seal of their own religious hopes and fantasies on the occasion (comforting and re-assuring themselves that they will be reunited with their loved one, and so on). Harmless enough, on the whole? Should, then, it be shaped in accordance with their wishes, particularly if they are especially religious, or more simply possibly, in accordance with, and out of respect for the wishes of the deceased (particularly if they were

not)? Conversely, should the atheistic, left behind, feel obliged to afford full church honours to the victim, thus honouring beliefs which in many cases have died along with the deceased? A recent feature on *Woman's Hour* (to which I have become an occasional listener on the spare days of my dotage) highlighted the various parties whom we might feel we ought to please and/or comfort – not just family but close friends, colleagues, professional, sporting or social companions, each with their own vision of what the deceased might have wanted, each with their own needs. Bowie spared more trouble than he could have imagined perhaps.



Photo: [littlondonobservationist.wordpress.com](http://littlondonobservationist.wordpress.com)

Above all, we should be honouring a past life, hopefully long and happily lived and ended – but celebrating where someone has been, rather than a future life, a place where not everybody, victim included perhaps, may believe they are going! I am all for remembrance, commemoration or whatever you want to call it. So, wait a while, until the ash has dispersed or the ground begun to settle, THEN have a well-considered, well-presented event; bring together words and music or art which exemplify the character of the deceased – whether this be stuff they created personally or, in the case of more humble folk, the stuff of their dreams, perhaps; favourite poems, music and so on.

You could say, at the end of the day, the victim's day that is, that they themselves will not be there and so why be concerned by whatever form any funeral service might take? Let the others, those left alive, have their way. Die and let live, so to speak. But I do wonder what, honestly, is best...

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Dr John Pearson is Chair of SOF trustees. He lives in Newcastle and recently retired from his job as a lecturer at Northumbria University.

## Pay Day

The last day of May – overnight  
the garden has opened out,  
  
firethorns drip cream  
along the boundary fence,  
  
poppies rise up  
from glaucous leaves,  
  
spread split red skirts,  
reveal their black centres,  
  
their secret places, silk filaments,  
the puckered green of their sex,  
  
everywhere such generosity –  
and you, love, closed tight, tight  
  
as a miser's tight fist on pay day,  
you, too, now open yourself to me.

Angela Kirby



By kind permission of the publisher, Shoestring Press, 'Pay Day' is reprinted from Angela Kirby's collection *The Day after Always* reviewed on page 25.



*Sikh volunteers giving out curry to villagers in flood-hit Croston, Lancashire*