



No. 68 November 2004

Nezahualc6yotl  
(Hungry Coyote),  
1402-1472,  
poet and King of  
Texcoco,  
opposed, in his  
day, the human  
sacrifice  
practised by the  
dominant culture  
of America.\*



# *Against Human Sacrifice*

\*The Aztecs

**SOF** is the magazine of the Sea of Faith Network (UK), an informal network of individuals and local groups 'exploring and promoting religious faith as a human creation'. It is published in January, March, May, July, September and November.

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**Peter Stribblehill, 149 Hagley Road,  
Halesowen B63 4JN  
peter.stribblehill@which.net**

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**Dinah Livingstone, 10 St Martin's Close,  
London NW1 0HR  
dinah@katabasis.co.uk**

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## LETTERS

Letters are particularly welcome and should be emailed or posted to:

**Oliver Essame, SOF Letters' Editor, Gospel Hill  
Cottage, Chapel Lane, Whitfield, Brackley NN13 5TF  
oliver@essame.clara.net**

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**Portholes Editor:  
Ken Smith, Bridleways, Haling Grove,  
South Croydon, CR2 6DQ  
revkevin19@hotmail.com**

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Head and shoulders of the full-length picture of King Nezahualcōyotl in the *Codex Ixtilxōchitl*.

# An Ongoing Conversation

First, I'd like to thank Paul Overend for all his help and advice when he handed over the editorship of the magazine. I have been thinking about his last editorial in *SoF* 66 and an ongoing conversation with it seemed like a good starting point for my first one in this issue.

In his paragraph about his own theological pilgrim's progress, Paul describes how a *via negativa* led him to a philosophical theology where the sublime and atheism meet. I agree with this. God is 'not that', 'not that', 'not that', becoming more and more abstract to vanishing point. Being comes down to beings (plural: Greek: *ta onta*; or, in Heideggerian German jargon, *Sein* comes down to *das Seiende*). The *via negativa* says that God is not any individual being, up to the point of pure abstraction, which becomes a vanishing point. (Nevertheless, the verb 'to be' is notoriously slippery in every language; Anselm's ontological argument is invalid, but continues to fascinate.) Likewise 'life' comes down to the living (also plural). If we say there is life on Earth (or Mars), we mean there are living things on Earth (or Mars). There are living things on Earth but, as far as we know, on Mars there are not. Whereas in T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, for example, Love is used with portentous religiosity as an abstract noun, it is first and foremost a verb, which only occurs when in a finite tense.

Overend then goes on to say that more important than the quest for mystical or intellectual knowledge, he has learnt (through his study of Levinas) the need for ethical action, the calling to responsibility. He tells me he is now starting a job at Liverpool Hope University, teaching Philosophy and Ethics, and will also be assisting with some modern theology. *SoF* magazine looks forward to hearing from him in future.

I'd like to suggest that, in Karl Rahner's words, this is not a case of a 'polemical either-or' but of a 'synthetic both-and'; that the achievement of atheism through a *via negativa* is closely linked with the achievement of a more adequately human ethic. On the cover I have put a picture of Nezahualcōyotl (Hungry Coyote), the pre-conquest poet-king of Texcoco in what is now Mexico. Texcoco was a lesser

city state in alliance with the then dominant power, the Aztecs of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (rather like Britain and the USA today). As well as being a good poet, Hungry Coyote was a philosopher and mystic. He opposed the human sacrifice practised by the superpower culture, went off and fasted for forty days in a forest, hungering for the Unknown God. He discovered a God, whom he called the Life-Giver, who forbade human sacrifice. Directly opposite the temple of the Sun God, who required a constant supply of sacrificial blood to keep rising again each day, he built a temple to this Unknown God, which had no images in it at all. Thus his poetic-philosophical *via negativa* is accompanied by the achievement of a more humane ethic.

Not that far from ancient Texcoco, in El Salvador, the liberation theologian Jon Sobrino was the Jesuit who was not murdered in the attack on the UCA University in San Salvador in 1989, because he happened to be abroad that night. (The massacre was carried out by the Atlacatl battalion, trained in the notorious US School of the Americas, at a time when the US was pouring millions of dollars into the El Salvador armed forces.) Sobrino defines an idol as a false god that demands and feeds on death and denounces the murderous idols of today (such as Mammon and Oil). For Sobrino God is not a death-dealing idol but the God of Life. Although as a Jesuit his liberation theology is constrained by Catholic orthodoxy, his theological *via negativa* has something in common with the one described above: at the top there is a vanishing point. Sobrino never denies that God exists, but he says that the place to find God is in Christ and the place to find Christ today is in 'the crucified people', the poor and dispossessed. Once again, upon reaching the summit, the search has nowhere to go except come down to Earth, to real people living, hoping and suffering on Earth, and to ethical action.

In his final piece on Radical Theology (also SoF 66) Trevor Greenfield asks, 'Is God actually an imaginative and poetic construction rather than a philosophical one?' There is not enough room to explore this fascinating topic here (though I hope the magazine will do so in the future), just to make one related suggestion. We could look at (the apostle) Paul's description of Christ's body as a poetic trope or figure of speech called 'synecdoche', when a part of something is used to mean the whole, as for example, when workers are called 'hands'. Paul calls Christ 'the head' and the rest of the body consists of other human beings who 'fill up what is wanting', so that Christ becomes complete – attains 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4:13ff). Thus 'Christ' becomes a poetic or 'synecdochic' way of talking about humanity.

This issue of SoF contains two articles about Christians from different parts of the world, the German Dorothee Sölle (who died recently) and the Brazilian archbishop Hélder Câmara. Both of them made an arduous spiritual journey, in the course of which their poetic, mystical apprehensions and contact with real people led them to resistance and involvement with pressing earthly problems.

In his article on US policy and the war in Iraq Mike Phipps shows today's dominant power still practising human sacrifice to idols, predominantly Mammon and Oil. The main idol of both the Aztecs and the current American superpower is concerned with the supply of energy. Whereas the Aztecs believed that if they did not feed the Sun with blood it would not rise, the US power abuses and kills people to supply its need for oil, upon which its society (and the global economy it dominates) depends. They are not prepared to moderate this requirement (at Kyoto, for example), even at the risk of sacrificing the planet itself.

In the Old Testament, God develops. The God of Joshua not only allows but orders genocide, mass murder of children, land-grabbing etc. (cf. Jos. 8:18-22; 11:6-22), whereas the God of the prophets requires 'kindness and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings' (Hos. 6: 6; cf. Amos 5:12-21; 8:4-6). Which is the God of Israel today? God's development is accompanied by an ethical development and the ethical criterion is a humanist one. The God of Joshua endorses inhuman behaviour. Of course, in one sense we cannot say that the violence and death inflicted on Canaan by the children of Israel and authorised by their God is inhuman behaviour, because, after all, they were human beings and they did it and today too, humans continue to behave like that all the time. Here the word 'inhuman' is an ethical term, a judgment of how human beings should and should not behave. The Christian, Jewish and Muslim fundamentalist God, who authorises human sacrifice, comes low down in the foothills on the pilgrimage of the *via negativa*

with its accompanying requirement of humane behaviour. The fundamentalist God of these three great religions looks very similar. Likewise a Christian, Jewish and Muslim humanism would have a lot in common.

So one vital question for SoF to explore further is the connection between 'is' and 'ought', ontology and ethics. Having struggled to get rid of a supernatural God, what then should we do to live well as individuals, as a species, as an ecosystem on Earth? What is the nature of the link between the *via negativa* that ends in atheism, and the rejection of human sacrifice?

Anyone who lived strictly by the philosophical adage that no 'is' can imply an 'ought' would quickly be arrested. Even if you simply ignored conventional codes like a red light meaning 'Stop', you could kill someone. Every ordinary mother would agree that 'my baby is hungry' means 'I ought to feed him'. A solar ethic of just beaming like a little ray of sunshine is inadequate. We need an earthly ethic that recognises we are physical and social beings living with our fellow creatures, both human and non-human, on Earth. It is wrong to drop into a blissful void while driving a train or minding a toddler. If someone died as a result, you would be responsible and could be found guilty of manslaughter. The former activity is regarded as a working class job and the latter is usually done by women. Does doing such 'menial' work help these 'lesser mortals' acquire more common sense (cf. Lk. 10:21)?

So-called 'non-realist' theory applied to people on Earth tends to be privatised. However, just as 'there is no such thing as a private language' we can argue that 'there is no such thing as a private ethics', because we are physical and social beings whose actions affect others. As Shylock says, 'If you prick us do we not bleed?' There is a dialectic to explore between the need to get beyond a privatised, 'lifestyle' ethics which can be harmful, even if only by default, and the right of each person to follow their conscience. As we cannot resolve our own or the world's ethical problems in isolation, since no one is an island, what common ground can we find, what common cause?

In this search, both for personal enlightenment and communion, having de-supernaturalised God, what can we salvage from the religious traditions to which we belong and/or out of which we have come? What is anti-human and needs discarding? What wisdom do they contain in terms of world-view, ethics, stories, poetry, prayer and ceremonies? Oddly enough, many people seem to find no discontinuity in becoming an atheist, especially if they reached that conclusion through a *via negativa*, which arrives at a summit of abstraction and then has nowhere else to go but down to Earth.

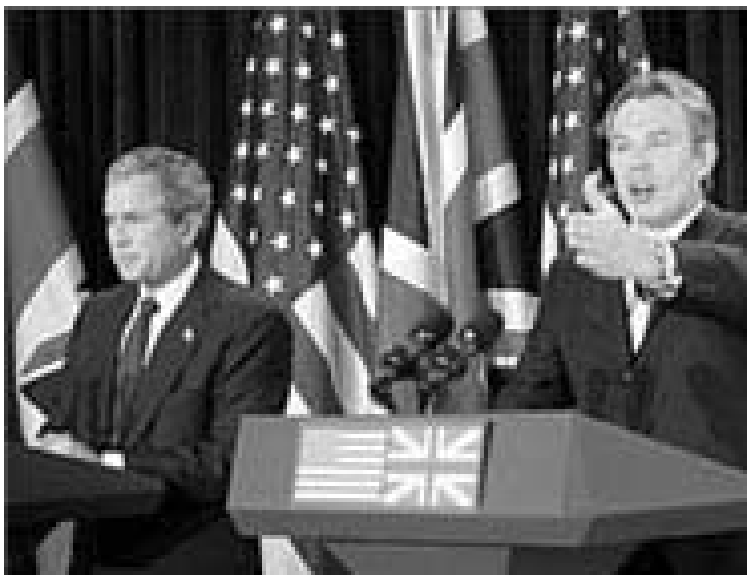
# Terrorism and Resistance in Occupied Iraq

Nothing good can come from our policy in Iraq, argues Mike Phipps. It's time to set a date for withdrawing the troops.

On one level, terrorism – the violent targeting of civilians to pursue a political goal – is very easy to define. On closer inspection, however, the use of the term is highly charged politically. How is it that the US-funded guerrillas, the forerunner of the Taliban, resisting the Government of Afghanistan in the 1980s, were designated freedom fighters by their White House sponsors? How could the Nicaraguan contras, trained in techniques of torture and pillage and likewise funded by the US in the Reagan years, be described by that President as the 'moral equivalent of our founding fathers'? And above all, why is it that our opinion formers rarely refer to state terrorism – by far the most ubiquitous kind – when discussing the conflicts in Chechnya, Palestine and Iraq?

I was reflecting on these problems recently when introduced to Zenab, an eleven-year-old Iraqi girl. She had come to the UK to have a prosthetic limb fitted, after she had lost a leg in a US bombing raid on her house in Baghdad, which killed seventeen members of her family, including her mother and both her brothers. In the eyes of the American perpetrators of this act, Zenab is not a terrorist victim; she is 'collateral damage'.

Comforting though it might be to believe that acts of this kind are accidental by-products of a worthier policy, it would unfortunately be a long way from the truth. The US has an entire academy devoted to training terrorists, torturers and human rights abusers. It's called the School of the Americas, based in Fort Benning, Georgia. The School has graduated over 500 of the worst human rights abusers in the western hemisphere. One of them, a former Guatemalan Defence Minister, gave an address to the School just two years after a US court had



200 people, the majority children, were graduates of the School. The same was true of the officer responsible for the rape and murder of three American nuns and a lay missionary a year earlier.

All in the past? Sadly, not. The abuses of a generation ago are now being visited on Iraq. It was not enough that Western governments should bankroll Saddam Hussein throughout the Iran-Iraq war, nor that the population of Iraq should suffer thirteen years of debilitating sanctions, responsible for the death of half a million Iraqi children – 'a price worth paying,' in the words of Clinton's Secretary of State Madeleine Albright – nor even the twice-weekly bombing raids by Britain and the US from 1998 on. Now

Iraq is a laboratory for a uniquely American violence of many dimensions. One remarkable feature in this sorry tale is the continuity of personnel with earlier abuse elsewhere. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, for example, first held office under Nixon and was involved in organising the coup d'état in Chile against the democratically elected Allende Government. Others, like US Ambassador to Iraq John Negroponte, cut their teeth organising terrorist atrocities against

democratic Nicaragua and training the Guatemalan military in the techniques of genocide in the Reagan era.

The humiliations and torture of Abu Ghraib prison are not unique, nor have they been fully exposed. New evidence emerges weekly of torture and abuse, including of women and children, in other US detention centres. What is revealing about the process, beyond the banal brutality, is the motivation. Systematic abuse is deployed not to elicit information from enemy suspects, but to break human spirits in order to create a network of informants. More than anything else, these desperate measures explode the myth that the US enjoys popular support in Iraq. The exposure of Abu Ghraib earlier this year constituted a turning point in public consciousness that fuelled a meteoric rise in anti-Occupation resistance. The principal response of the US to this development has been indiscriminate aerial bombardment. If George Bush is re-elected President, this is expected to intensify greatly.

Why Iraq? Given its absence of weapons of mass destruction, its lack of involvement with the terrorist attack

## The daily brutality of the Occupation is staggering.

ruled he was responsible for the gang rape of an American nun as part of his 'anti-terrorist' operations in Guatemala. In El Salvador, ten out of the twelve army officers cited in a UN report as responsible for a 1981 village massacre of over

on New York in 2001 and the mutual hostility between Saddam Hussein's regime and Al-Qaida, why has this country become the principal victim of US aggression? The reasons are complex. Iraq is not the first country to have been attacked by the US in recent years. It was preceded by Yugoslavia and Afghanistan and even while the war on Iraq was underway, the US played a central if little reported role in the coup against Haiti's elected government. All this reflects a growing awareness in neo-conservative circles that America can now operate with far fewer constraints than it faced in the Cold War era. The political situation has been transformed and it obviates the need for containment, deterrence or even respect for state sovereignty. The new watchword is 'pre-emptive attack' against 'perceived threats' from 'rogue states' – in other words, the US can do what it likes where it likes, pursuing active military supremacy over any other country – it already has its troops in 140 of them. 'Regime change' in Iraq – in reality

## The humiliations and torture of Abu Ghraib prison are not unique, nor have they been fully exposed.

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exchanging an awkward dictator for a compliant one – is just the first step in a project to impose the power realities of the New World Order on a host of countries – Vice President Cheney has referred to at least sixty in need of US attention.

Regionally, the US is fully aware that Saudi Arabia is a both a major economic power as well as the breeding ground for an anti-American fundamentalism that could not have been decisively challenged as long as Saddam was still in power in Iraq. 'The war,' wrote Naseer Aruri in early 2003, 'would aim to deprive Saudi Arabia of any leverage over oil prices, intimidate Syria and Hizbullah, tip the domestic balance in Iran in favour of the "reformists", dissuade Iran from developing sophisticated weapons, and settle the Arab-Israeli conflict on terms wholly agreeable to Israel.'

Oil indeed was another key factor in the targeting of Iraq. Occupation has given the US control of the world's second largest oil field – weakening not only Saudi leverage, but that of OPEC generally, which includes other problematic countries for the US, such as Venezuela. Halliburton Oil, of which Vice President Cheney was formerly CEO, will benefit particularly from Iraq's oil expropriation, but there are rich pickings for other US companies too. More than forty government-owned enterprises are earmarked for privatisation and the US giant Bechtel has received the first major contract for reconstructing Iraq's infrastructure in a bidding process that was restricted to US firms. Bechtel is intimately connected to the Republican Administration and the contract is estimated to be worth \$20 billion, nearly double the corporation's 2002 takings.

On top of this, Iraq is the most indebted county in the world, owing \$130 billion, about ten times its expected 2004 export earnings, which from January 2005 it will have to start repaying. This debt will be used by international creditors as a lever to control its economic policies. Although its creditors may reduce the absolute amount owed, the conditions of any such reduction would be

determined by the International Monetary Fund: typically, rapid privatisation, a liberal trade regime and an austerity programme. Thus, key economic decisions would be taken largely by American officials – a further affront to Iraq's sovereignty.

Iraq is already paying war reparations, \$1.5 billion in the last eighteen months, more than its health and education budgets combined. Many in Iraq argue that it is the creditors who lent Saddam money who should be paying compensation to Iraq, especially as their loans financed the production of the kind of chemical weapons used at Halabja in 1988.

Earlier this year the occupying administration handed over power to an interim government in an entirely cosmetic exercise. Over 175,000 foreign troops and tens of thousands of mercenaries remain in Iraq and outside Iraqi law. All security remains Pentagon-financed. Oil revenues continue to be controlled by the Development Fund for Iraq, consisting of ten foreigners and one Iraqi. The country's media is to be controlled by a commission appointed for five years – by Washington. The new government itself is merely a facade, unelected and without any legitimacy. One of its first actions was to ban the independent media outlet Al-Jazeera and its impotence in recent hostage crises underlines that real power in Iraq remains with the US.

The daily brutality of the Occupation is staggering. Allied forces don't keep statistics of Iraqi civilian deaths, but one detailed survey carried out by Iraqi academics estimated that more than 37,000 Iraqi civilians were killed between the start of the US-led invasion in March 2003 and October 2003. These numbers are likely to increase sharply, as the US opts for more air strikes on civilian areas, a growing number of which are controlled by anti-Occupation forces.

In these conditions, legitimacy will belong to those who expel the Occupiers. Resistance is growing and taking diverse forms, not just military: strikes and civil disobedience often go unreported. The longer the Occupation continues, however, the more violence is likely to dominate the opposition, as this is the principal means of control used by the Occupiers. Those who favour a pluralist Iraq, with a developed civil society – free trades unions and women's organisations, for example – should therefore work with some urgency to end this Occupation. The longer it continues the more Iraq will come to resemble Palestine or Chechnya.

Two further points should be made. Firstly, a war and Occupation based on greed and deceit cannot be converted after the event into something positive for Iraqis. It must be ended forthwith. Secondly, as co-occupiers, the British Government share moral responsibility for all the war crimes – torture, civilian killings and so on – perpetrated by the US military. That presents us with a clear responsibility: working to commit the Government to set a date for British troop withdrawal. A recent poll indicated that 71% of the public agree with this. Now it must be made to happen.

Mike Phipps is a member of the Editorial Board of the monthly magazine Labour Left Briefing, a specialist in Central American affairs and an activist with Iraq Occupation Focus.

# Mysticism and Resistance

## A Memoir of Dorothee Sölle



Inge Remmert-Fontes met Dorothee Sölle when she joined her in 'Political Night Prayers' in Cologne in the 1960s. Following her friend's death last year, Inge recalls a life and work, in which prayer and political activism remained consistently inseparable.

Mysticism and Resistance wasn't Dorothee Sölle's last book. However, after her sudden death it has come to seem almost like her testament, as it sums up the way she lived, what she was committed to, and what she often expressed in words that made her readers and listeners think: 'That's just what I believe too'.

Dorothee Sölle was born in Cologne in 1929. She studied classical philology, philosophy, literature and theology. Despite qualifying as a university lecturer in 1971 and many years as a visiting professor abroad, she was never given a professorship in Germany, because her opinions were highly controversial in the academic world. It was only in 1994 that she became honorary professor at Hamburg University.

She became well-known as the co-instigator of the 'Political Night Prayers' held in Cologne from 1968 to 1972. Her writings and talks, as well as her social and political commitment pointed the way for many, including many young people. For Dorothee Sölle, leading a christian life, political commitment and theology belonged inseparably together. As an activist in the peace movement, she engaged in civil disobedience and practised non-violent resistance, for which she received repeated court convictions for 'attempted coercion'.

**A 'hermeneutics of hunger' ... for bread and freedom, ... for spirituality, the search for meaning, beyond the hopeless emptiness of consumerism, depression and isolation.**

Dorothee Sölle died on Sunday April 27th 2003 at the age of 73. Over the weekend, together with her husband Fulbert Steffensky, she had taken part as the main speaker in a seminar on the theme of 'God and happiness'.

In her book, *Mysticism and Resistance*, at the end of Part 1, which aims to be 'a general introduction to mystical thinking...stages on the way of mysticism for people on the

journey today', Dorothee Sölle lists these 'stages' for herself as: 'Being Amazed; Letting Go; Resisting'.

She calls amazement being overwhelmed 'in the face of what encounters us in nature and in history's experiences of liberation', beholding the world like God after the sixth day of creation. However, this amazement is not only the experience of unending bliss, like the child's amazement on discovering the beauty of the world for the first time, but also the 'dark side of terror and hopelessness, that renders one mute'. This 'dark side' means not closing your eyes and heart to the suffering in the world. For Dorothee Sölle both these aspects of amazement mean that the soul becomes free from 'habits, viewpoints and convictions' that make us insensitive. It also means that we do not take this first step on the mystical way as seekers, but as 'those who have been found; the goodness we experience is there already long before'.

While we are amazed, we begin 'leaving ourselves' or 'letting go', which for Dorothee Sölle starts with simple questions, like: 'What do I perceive? What do I keep away from myself? What touches me? What do I choose?' 'She describes letting go of false desires and needs, and our amazement in everyday life brings us closer to what mysticism calls 'being apart'. For her this is 'actively bidding farewell to the customs and norms of our culture'.

The third stage on the mystical way she describes – resistance – also implies healing. Healing means that 'humans live in compassion and justice co-creatively; in being healed, they experience also that they can heal'. The being at-one that this involves is not individualistic self-

realisation, but moves beyond that to social change of 'death-oriented reality'. As I am amazed and let go of what I am used to, keep taking leave of my old ideas, resistance follows almost inevitably and requires change. This change is expressed in forms of resistance.

For Dorothee Sölle mysticism and transformation are inseparably linked. This comes out very clearly in the final

chapter of her book *Mysticism and Resistance*, called 'A Mysticism of Liberation', in which she mentions several examples from Latin America: the story *Death and Life of Severino* by the North Brazilian João Cabral, liberation theology in general, and the particular approaches of Pedro Casaldáliga and Dom Hélder Câmara.

She starts with a model of 'centre and periphery', to describe the dependence of the poor majority on the rich minority. Awareness of this structural violence is necessary in order to understand a mysticism of liberation. Dorothee Sölle speaks of a 'hermeneutics of hunger', meaning the hunger of the poor for bread and freedom, and the 'hunger (in the First World) for spirituality, the search for meaning', beyond the hopeless emptiness of consumerism, depression

## She engaged in civil disobedience and practised non-violent resistance, for which she received repeated court convictions.

and isolation, that produce a kind of 'spiritual anorexia'.

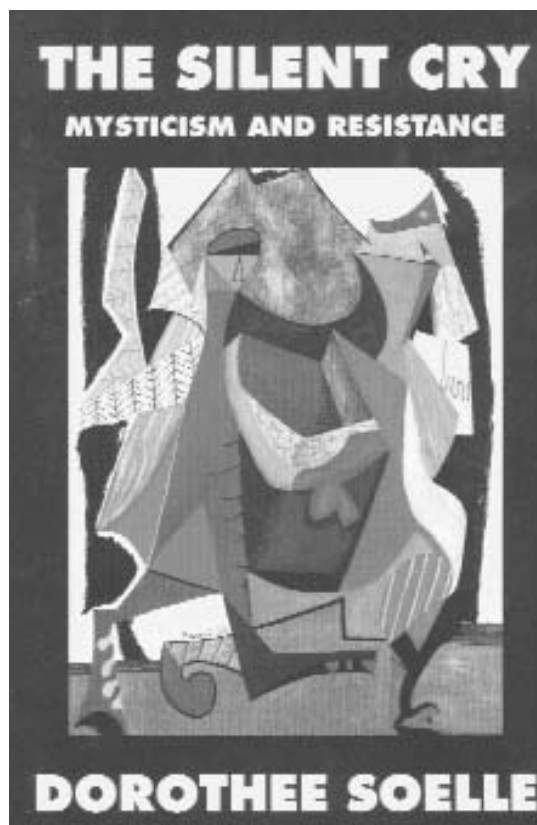
Dorothee Sölle uses her examples in this chapter to describe what she calls a 'mysticism with its eyes open', that expresses itself in changes in behaviour and religious teaching. These include:

- Orthopraxis (doing right), which means that in an unjust situation truth cannot be communicated only as a matter of correct belief and confession, but also in the struggle for liberation;
- The teaching office of the poor, women, blacks and laity in the base communities creates a new space for them;
- The rediscovery of indigenous religions contributes to the 'reconciliation of the victims of the history of the conquest with the religion of the conquistadors'.

Dorothee Sölle sees the changes required for necessary resistance exemplified in the life and works of Dom Hélder Câmara, the Brazilian archbishop, who was one of the first to describe a spiral of violence. Câmara distinguishes between:

- 'Violence number one', that injures the dignity and the most basic rights of human beings. He calls war' not only the immediate violence done by weapons, but also hunger, unemployment, destruction of the basic necessities of life. This institutional violence leads to another form of violence:
- 'Violence number two', which is a reactive violence and may take criminal or revolutionary forms. Reactive violence finally leads to:
- 'Violence number three', repression in all forms of censorship, imprisonment, abduction, exile, torture and murder.

The passive resistance 'without hatred and without



violence' that Dom Hélder Câmara sets against this spiral of violence could also be regarded as the watchword of Dorothee Sölle's own life. This resistance is rooted in the conviction that love is stronger than hatred and the right to tell the truth can be gained through love and friendship.

At the end of her book Dorothee Sölle describes what the mystical way means, mysticism as singleness of life and the qualities it demands. She quotes the description of a Quaker life:

- boundless happiness
- absolute fearlessness
- constant difficulty.

Dorothee Sölle will be personally missed by many people, her skill, her determination, her courage, her example as a committed woman and as a theologian, who not only preached but did what she could to bring about the changes she demanded, her spirituality that gave space and courage to others. Her words, her thoughts, together with her books, will remain with us as vital companions on our way.

*September 2004  
Translated from German by the Editor*

Inge Remmert-Fontes has been a teacher and interpreter and worked for many years in co-operation for development. Recently, she has been working as a freelance counsellor, mediator and trainer in non-violent conflict resolution.



# Hélder Câmara: From Power to Prophecy

## Francis McDonagh

‘When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist,’ said Dom Hélder Câmara. Francis McDonagh describes the pilgrim’s progress of a born conservative, whose contact with the poor took him from being archbishop to outcast by repressive authorities.

Hélder Câmara, archbishop of Olinda and Recife in the North-East of Brazil, from 1964 to 1985, is unknown to many today, and yet he was for about fifteen years one of the most influential clerics in Latin America, and probably in the world. A talented orator and organiser, he had a successful career as a civil servant on loan to the Brazilian ministry of education, and was then an adviser to two archbishops of Rio de Janeiro. Returning to church affairs, he was given responsibility for Catholic Action. While this was in its origin a conservative political movement, under heavy clerical tutelage, designed to give the Catholic Church a lay political presence in an increasingly secular world, under Câmara’s leadership it schooled a generation of Brazilian Catholics in the social and economic realities of their world, and many became leaders of the resistance to the military dictatorship of 1964-85 or in post-dictatorship Brazil. At the commemoration in Recife of the fifth anniversary of Câmara’s death, on 27 August 1999, some of the survivors of this group testified to the freedom he encouraged. According to Luiz Alberto Gomez de Souza, ‘Dom Hélder was dominant, but did not quench people. He did not have disciples, he had companions whom he trusted.’ This promotion of lay leadership in the Church was to be taken further when he had charge of his own diocese.

Câmara came into his own when visits to Rome brought him into contact with the Vatican secretary of state, Giovanni Batista Montini, later Pope Paul VI. The two became firm friends, and this relationship helped Câmara with his project to set up a national administration for the Church in Brazil. Under the name of the ‘bishops’ conference’, this became the model for national Church administration throughout the Roman Catholic Church. Its significance was that it broke both with the ‘monarchical papacy’, ruling the universal Church through diocesan bishops, and with the ‘monarchical bishop’, unchallenged within his own diocese: now he was invited to share his pastoral ministry with his fellow bishops to face the wider challenges of a country or region. Câmara went on, with Chilean bishop Manuel Larraín, to set up a bishops’

council for the whole of Latin America. It is no accident that John Paul II’s Grand Inquisitor, Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, has targeted bishops’ conferences as unorthodox, for breaking the direct link between Pope and diocesan bishop.



Câmara was also active at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the assembly of Catholic bishops called by John XXIII to ‘open the windows’ of the Church to the modern, secular world. He was the organiser of the most effective progressive network at the Council, based at the Brazilian bishops’ residence, the Domus Mariae, bringing together prelates from various countries. The lectures held at the Domus Mariae, given by theologians or Council fathers, became a reference for all who wanted to understand what was really going on at Vatican II. But closest to Câmara’s heart was the group known as the ‘Church of the poor’, concerned about the gulf between the Church and the poor, which tried to get the issue of world poverty on the Council agenda. In this they were only partly successful, but Câmara was a vehement defender of what became Council Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, when conservatives argued that the Church had no authority to pronounce on social issues, conveniently forgetting past denunciations of evils such as religious liberty, liberalism and socialism.

Once appointed archbishop, Câmara put these ideas into practice in Olinda and Recife. He opened up the governance of his diocese through a series of consultative bodies, culminating in a pastoral assembly: the executive was a council consisting of the archbishop and his auxiliary, plus the episcopal vicars for various areas of ministry, who might be women or men, priests, religious or laity. The archdiocese had a ‘political arm’, a Justice and Peace Commission, responsible for tracking down the disappeared and political prisoners, but also supporting communities threatened with eviction by landowners or speculators.

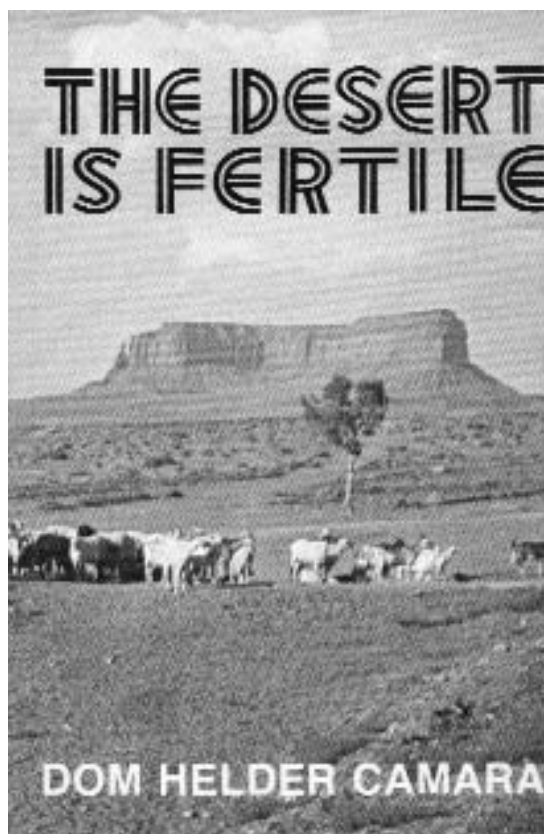
The core of the system was the network of base communities, 'the poor evangelising the poor', groups meeting for education and action even in the poorest areas. After pressure from the archdiocese's students for the priesthood, the seminary was replaced by 15 communities, each with a director, living in parishes. For study, the Recife Theological Institute (ITER) was founded in 1968. How different this was to be from a conventional theological college, Dom Hélder made clear in his inaugural lecture: 'Here will come, to teach and to learn, bishops of the holy Church..., priests and candidates for the priesthood,... religious women, ... lay people,... non-Christians, God-fearing and thirsty for the truth, ...agnostics and atheists, very often Christians in practice.'

But Câmara's opening up of the Church to the world of the poor was dangerous in the Brazil of the 1960s. He was appointed as archbishop of the diocese of Olinda and Recife on the day in 1964 that a military coup overthrew the elected Brazilian government and introduced twenty-one years of authoritarian rule, torture and assassination. One of his closest colleagues was savagely murdered, and Câmara became a non-person, with the Brazilian media banned from mentioning him.

This virtual exile within his own country brought a new and unexpected turn to his life's work. Silenced in Brazil, he began to travel the world, not only to publicise the crimes of the dictatorship, but also to articulate his developing conviction that the root cause of violence was injustice. Though phrased in the language of the 1960s, the era of 'development' and the Alliance for Progress, his warnings about the impoverishment produced by modern capitalism for the majority of the world's population rich and poor prefigure today's globalisation debate:

## One of his closest colleagues was savagely murdered, and Câmara became a non-person.

'I became very involved in the idea of "development". The word conveyed a hope for solidarity and for a real collaboration between rich and poor countries...But it very soon became evident that the developed countries' resolution to set aside one per cent of their gross national product for aid to underdeveloped countries was not going to solve the problem... It's become absolutely clear to me...that there is no hope of our people being liberated through capitalism. Of course there are different kinds of capitalism, but in every capitalist system the concern with profit takes precedence over concern for people. Even when they say: "All you have to do is wait! First we must develop the economy, then we'll tackle social reform!", it's still profit that comes first. And it's clear that the most advanced element of capitalism, the multinational company, makes the privileged classes richer and the poor poorer.'



His solution, too, is uncannily like today's anti-globalisation movement. He believes in 'liberating moral pressure', but he ceased to believe that this could come 'from institutions such as the churches, the universities, trade unions, the press'. 'Then I discovered minorities... in every institution there are minorities who, beneath a vast diversity of denominations, leaders and objectives, share a common hunger and thirst for justice: minorities for whom justice is the path of peace. I call them

"Abrahamic minorities" in honour of Abraham, the father of all those who over the centuries have continued to hope against hope. But I should like to find a more universal name for them: Jews and Moslems and Christians know Abraham, but Abraham means nothing in the East.' The last comment illustrates Câmara's increasing sense of the universality of this vocation, which seems to have developed as his international horizons

widened. With atheism he had long since ceased to have a problem, though he interpreted it in terms of the then fashionable theory of 'anonymous Christians': 'I disagree with those who say that atheistic humanism is doubly atheistic, because it denies God and puts man in God's place. It seems to me that, on the contrary, the true atheistic humanist fulfils at least half of the Law: he loves his neighbour. And if you love mankind sincerely, then without knowing it and even without wishing it, you also love God.'

The process by which Câmara came to reject the political movement sympathetic to the ideas of Salazar in favour of a radical, communitarian democracy is another key theme of his life-story. The process was more than a shift from political right to political left. The constant was a conviction that Christianity had a mission to the world, was, in the broadest sense, political. The change seems to have taken place along

two parameters. The first was a closer contact with the poor, and a growing sense of both their plight and their potential. The second appears to have been a growing scepticism of institutions, including the Church. Certainly his recently published letters from the Second Vatican Council show his frustration at the difficulty of transforming the ecclesiastical system from an instrument of power to a force for liberation.

## **‘In every institution there are minorities who, beneath a vast diversity of denominations, leaders and objectives, share a common hunger and thirst for justice.’**

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Câmara's political activism was inseparable from his Catholic belief, and that belief was firmly orthodox, if not conservative, centred on devotion to the mass, the Trinity, the Virgin Mary and his guardian angel, who seems to have been a sort of alter ego, whom Câmara called José, significantly, the nickname his mother had given him. But he was able to use this belief as the basis for radical conclusions. His inaugural sermon as archbishop, delivered on 12 April 1964, twelve days after the military coup, is a fine example:

‘Although to some people it may seem strange, I declare that in the North-East Christ is called Zé, Antônio or Severino. Ecce homo! Behold the man! Behold the Christ. He is the man who needs justice, has a right to justice, deserves justice.

‘Severino, son of Severino, nephew of Severino, has a bleak life; it is a death in life. He vegetates more than he lives a human life. He does not vegetate like a leafy tree, but like the cactus, his brother. Until today he has not rebelled. He has learned from his illiterate parents and at the church of his lordly landowner boss to be patient, like the Son of God, who has endured so much injustice that he died on the cross to save us.

And if, tomorrow, the labourer shows ingratitude, pretends to be a human being, taking an interest in innovations, frequenting radio schools, participating in trade unionism, talking about rights, then the boss is convinced there is cause for alarm: the wind of subversion is blowing – even, who knows? of communism. And then, without the least hesitation or remorse, he sacks the worker, drive him off his lands, and if needs be, demolishes the shanty in which the worker lived with his family.’

This quotation shows a number of features of Câmara's thought, a traditional, if radical, theology of the incarnation, a lyricism focused on the natural world,

and a passionate hatred of injustice. He was not a theologian, and frequently joked about his traditional theology, while at the same time using it as the premise for revolutionary innovations in ecclesiastical structure. Asked if he was not afraid to live alone, he acts out a conversation he has had many times: ‘“But I do not live by myself.” “So there is always someone else here?” “But certainly. There are three persons – the Father, the

Son and the Holy Spirit.” I enjoy all the current discussions of theologians very much, but I must admit I hold on to my own conception of the Blessed Trinity.’

A constant practice of Câmara's was a daily vigil, from 2:00 to 4:00 a.m., when he would meditate, pray and write, often poetic meditations. These were clearly centring, grounding, times that gave him the energy for the incessant activity and

interaction with others that took up the rest of his day. From his frequent references to them, they seem to have consisted often of familiar conversations with God, about current concerns, alternating with speculations about why the world is as it is, or flights of lyricism about the natural world. It seems that these meditations, as much as anything, were the source of the increasing openness of his religious outlook.

With the move to restore a more authoritarian model of Church from 1979 with the election as Pope John Paul II of Karol Wojtyła, Câmara once again became a non-person. His resignation speedily accepted in 1985, a successor was appointed to undo his work. The former premises of the Justice and Peace Commission were sold off to becoming a shopping mall. Câmara, bound by his loyalty to the papacy, kept silent, though his friends describe him weeping in private. Today, while the Catholic Church in Recife moulders in irrelevance, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, the most successful of Brazilian neo-Pentecostal multinationals, is erecting a lavish new cathedral. But there are signs that Hélder Câmara may be vindicated. His vision of a Church freed from clericalism and dedicated to establishing justice and peace shines more brightly by contrast with the repressive thrashings of a declining pontificate.

Francis McDonagh works on Latin America for the Catholic development agency, CAFOD. He writes on Latin America for *The Tablet*, and is preparing a collection of Hélder Câmara's writings to be published by Orbis Books, New York.

## Rob Wheeler reviews On Humanism

by Richard Norman

Routledge. 2004. 170pp. £8.99.

ISBN: 0415305233

This is another book in the excellent 'Thinking in Action' series from Routledge, which provide short but intelligent introductions to the Big Questions for the general reader. A book in the same series, 'On Religion', has been favourably reviewed in a previous edition of this magazine and in my opinion this one comes up to the same high standard. In fact this is the first book of humanist apologetics that I would not feel embarrassed to give to a friend to read.

The trouble with most books arguing for humanism is that they start with a crude critique of religion, focusing in an entirely unbalanced way on the horrors committed by Roman Catholicism in the past and the idiocies of Evangelicals and Fundamentalist in the present. Having shown that religion is mad, bad, dangerous and false they tend to assume that there is nothing else they have to do. secular humanism naturally follows by default, QED, and requires no justification in its own right. At this point we can all stop thinking.

At best this is just intellectually lazy and at worst it smacks of the 'bad faith' or inauthenticity described by Jean Paul Sartre in many of his novels – the failure to take responsibility for establishing one's own philosophy of life. In this case the failure consists in defining oneself entirely in terms of an enemy. 'Do you want to know who I am? Well I'm NOT THAT,' the vulgar humanist says pointing to their hated religious opponent. The logic of this move is in many ways similar to that made by racists who choose to define themselves exclusively in terms of their hatred and opposition to minority ethnic groups. Ironically, it displays just the shallow-minded sectarianism that humanists frequently criticise in conservative religionists!

It is refreshing to find in Richard Norman's book a more sophisticated approach to humanist apologetics that does not commit this fault and makes a clear, honest, and I think successful, effort to meet some of the genuine and substantive objections to humanism. This may in some part be due to the author being a professional philosopher in the Anglo-Saxon analytical tradition (formerly professor of philosophy at the University of Kent) and therefore practised in such critical thinking.

The book's opening chapters follow the usual themes that have now become almost obligatory in humanist apologetics – the origin and history of the word 'humanism', the conflict between science and religion, the failure of natural theology arguments for the existence of God and the possibility of morality without religion. These topics are competently covered and the arguments cogent. However, as the author himself admits this is not new ground and there is nothing original in his treatment. Where I feel the book really scores is in its refusal simply to dismiss objections to humanism; it takes them seriously and tries to meet them by supplying a case for humanism in its own terms.

The starting point of humanism, Norman says, is not just in its rejection of supernaturalism and religion but also in 'the positive affirmation that human beings can find from within themselves the good life without religion'. However,



reviews

he admits that an optimistic celebration of human dignity and worth is in danger of lapsing into naivety. Indeed, some of the Enlightenment philosophers tended to argue that all that was required for the perfection of Man (yes man) was the removal of superstition and the application of education so that thereafter Reason would flourish, Humanity would live in harmony and Progress with a capital 'P' would be inevitable. This dream seems to have been shattered by the horrors of the Twentieth Century: the slaughter in the trenches of the First World War, Nazism, Stalinism, the Holocaust and Hiroshima. And what is worse for the humanist is that many of these atrocities were frequently perpetrated in the name of secular ideologies.

Norman bites the bullet and accepts that humanity is capable of terrible acts. However, he does not admit that this must necessarily lead to cynicism, despair or a religious belief in Original Sin. He looks to specific examples of human compassion, dignity and heroism for hope and consolation. In particular, he refers to the experiences of Primo Levi in Auschwitz, where despite the suffering and degradation, some were able to preserve their humanity. He quotes Levi: 'I was... helped by the determination, which I stubbornly preserved, to recognise always, even in the darkest days, in my companions and in myself, men, not things, and thus to avoid total humiliation and demoralisation which led so many to spiritual shipwreck.'

Levi's humanism is seen as an example of finding meaning and purpose in the particular, the provisional, the immanent instead of in the transcendent. This is a theme that Norman returns to several times in the book, since a frequent challenge put to humanists is how they can find meaning and purpose in a world with no overarching supernatural structure. Norman argues that there is plenty of scope for finding meaning within the realisation of characteristically human values: the satisfaction of creative achievement; the excitement of curiosity and discovery; relationships with others; the life of the emotions; the enjoyment of beauty in nature and art. However, human values are fragile and provisional and failure and disappointment cannot be universally avoided. Thus tragedy is a constant possibility of the human condition.

The absence of a transcendent structure or guiding plan from the humanist world-picture is not seen by Norman as

a shortcoming of humanism. Rather, we can look to art, and more particularly the narrative arts, to provide that patterning function. It is not just that narratives help us to think about how to live, rather, 'to appreciate aesthetic form, the qualities of a work that make it aesthetically satisfying, is at the same time to recognise ways of shaping and giving significant structure to our own experience'. It is not by providing abstract, universal truths about the human condition but by their 'paradigmatic particularity' that stories inform us about life. Furthermore, the meanings articulated in stories are 'fragile, provisional and particular'

and cannot be abstracted from their narrative containers without net loss. Norman illustrates his point by reference to two novels: Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse* and Graham Swift's *Waterland*.

Overall I think that this is a philosophically satisfying exposition and defence of the subject that represents a humanism that is maturing and coming of age. I also think that the chapters covering Norman's treatment of narrative would alone justify one in buying the book.

Rob Wheeler is a member of Sea of Faith Network.

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# News Forum

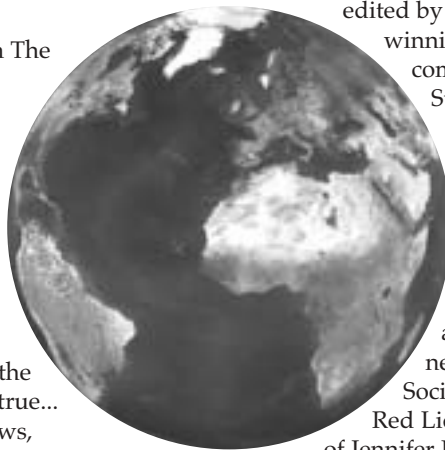
Readers are invited to send in news items of interest to SoF with comments.

## A Matter of Fact

On September 24th 2004 Stephen Bates, religious affairs correspondent, wrote in *The Guardian*: 'CAFOD, the Catholic aid agency, has admitted that it ignores "oversimplistic" solutions such as the Vatican's prohibition on the use of condoms when advising those at risk of contracting HIV/Aids in the developing world. An article by Ann Smith, the charity's HIV corporate strategist, in today's issue of the Catholic magazine *The Tablet* suggests that the church's insistence on abstinence as the only protection from infection is unrealistic.'

Previously (9.10.2003), it was reported in *The Guardian*: 'The Catholic Church is telling people in countries stricken by Aids not to use condoms because they have tiny holes in them through which HIV can pass – potentially exposing thousands of people to risk. The church is making the claims across four continents despite a widespread scientific consensus that condoms are impermeable to HIV. A senior Vatican spokesman backs the claims about permeable condoms, despite assurances by the World Health Organisation that they are untrue... The WHO has condemned the Vatican's views, saying: "These incorrect statements about condoms and HIV are dangerous when we are facing a global pandemic which has already killed more than 20 million people, and currently affects at least 42 million." The organisation says "consistent and correct" condom use reduces the risk of HIV infection by 90%. There may be breakage or slippage of condoms – but not, the WHO says, holes through which the virus can pass.'

This is an example of how the term 'non-real', is misleading and can be dangerous when used to refer to the Earth and its inhabitants. People are real. Whether someone is alive or dead is a matter of fact. Whether condoms help protect against HIV is a matter of fact. It does matter. We cannot fail to hear echoes of Galileo's defence when he was condemned by the Vatican Holy Office 371 years ago: 'Eppur si muove: It does move.'



## Conway Hall 75th Anniversary

On Thursday September 23rd Conway Hall Humanist Centre celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary with an exhibition and a Free Speech Panel. The Hall belongs to the South Place Ethical Society. Founded in 1793 as a Unitarian chapel, the Society developed into a humanist organisation and built its new larger premises, Conway Hall, in 1929.

The September 2004 issue of its journal, the *Ethical Record*, edited by Norman Bacrac, contains the two prize-winning essays in its anniversary essay competition with the given title: *The Only Sure Foundation for Ethics is God*. The prize-winners were Barbara Smoker, who argues for an ethics based on kindness, and Christopher Bratcher, who deconstructs the metaphor 'foundation.' Congratulations to them and to the South Place Ethical Society, mother of all humanist societies in Britain, on its anniversary, and we look forward to its next seventy-five years. South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall Humanist Centre, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. Telephone of Jennifer Jeynes Librarian and Programme Co-ordinator: 0207 242 8037.

## French Anti-fundamentalists

SoF editor has received a manifesto from a group of French anti-fundamentalist Protestant pastors. The group also has a website with a link to Sea of Faith at:

<http://perso.club-internet.fr/castelg/ang4.htm>

**Please send your letters to:**

Oliver Essame,  
 SOF Letters' Editor,  
 Gospel Hill Cottage,  
 Chapel Lane, Whitfield,  
 Brackley NN13 5TF. Email:  
 oliver@essame.clara.net

I read the September issue (SOF 67) straight through from cover to cover. I was then a little concerned to find when I had finished that I felt quite comfortable; I was at home, in good company, among friends and enjoying the chance to reminisce and reflect on experiences and values shared. Fair enough, you might say, that is what the network is for: to offer fellowship and support. But it will not survive if that is all it does; it must also provide for vigorous, lively debate, take delight in the controversial, cherish those who challenge the status quo and fiercely resist any tendency to rest on its laurels.

We might recognise that it is our duty to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable, but what if we are the comfortable? Who is going to afflict us? I would like to think that the network is astute enough to recognise the signs and strong enough to take corrective action. In the past, magazine articles have caused debates that lasted for several issues and the postbag was often used to promote contentious and sometimes, dare I say it, heretical views. We could do with more of the same.

Ronald Pearse reminds us in his editorial that our purpose, to explore and promote religious faith as a human creation, remains unchanged. But this process of 'human creation' is also never-ending and we must nurture our creative skills. I might share Don Cupitt's fascination with large-scale systematic thinking (Would I do it again the same way?), but I protest, in the manner of Groucho Marx, that I will not subscribe to that kind of large-scale systematic thinking which might appear to offer me a home. But in spite of that, I do think that we, like Don, might benefit from being 'more confident, explicit, ambitious, systematic and generally bossy'. If the network is to continue to flourish for the next twenty years then it must learn to delight in disagreement; like the oyster, if we are to produce pearls then we must first be irritated.

*Risley Ker, willaby45@yahoo.com*

I'll not say the festschrift (SOF 67) was not well deserved. I do have a first edition of *The Sea of Faith* and was glued to the broadcasts. But I think it may be time to declare close season on the personality cult and stop taking in one another's washing, don't you?

*Anna Sutcliffe, 14, Drummond Court,  
 Leeds LS16 5QE.*

Even more amazing than finding Reading FC at the top of the league this weekend was to read Don Cupitt's strange statement that taking part in team sports stops us thinking. (Would I do it again the same way? SOF 67)

In any co-operative activity we need at times to suspend our own thoughts and opinions, and yes, sport can become obsessive both for players and spectators, but to say that participation in sport protects you against ideas is ridiculous. Unfortunately, most of us probably tend to stop thinking very deeply as we grow up and become involved in our working lives with family responsibilities and so on. But why single out sport, especially team sport, which provides in microcosm a world where we learn to deal with success and failure, loyalty and betrayal, maybe even repentance and forgiveness?

Pace Bill Shankly, we all know that football and other sports are not matters of life and death, but nevertheless it's fun for an hour or two to pretend that they are, and to lose ourselves utterly in total commitment to a completely absorbing contest. Or to be 'ecstatically immanent in our own expressive activity' as Don himself puts it in *Solar Ethics*. As Hegel said, 'If there is a goal, there must be a system', (at least, that's how he's quoted on my philosophy-football T-shirt).

So if Steve Coppell sticks with the 4-4-2, Reading may yet gain promotion to the Premiership's promised land. Meanwhile, a glance at the league tables shows that Cambridge United are in dire need of some new ideas. How about going along to the Abbey Stadium on Saturday afternoons, Don?

*Keith Whyte, 82 Kiln Ride, Wokingham  
 Berks RG403PH.  
 keith.whyte@tiscali.co.uk*

Did it ever occur to you how astonishingly relevant the SOF agenda is to today's world with all the tribal conflict dragging us to global conflict of one sort or another? September 11th happened because religious devotees actually believed they were winning divine honours by crashing those two passenger planes into the two World Trade towers in New York; President Bush's Middle East policy appears heavily influenced by the Christian right; and the settlers in the West Bank similarly feel they are fulfilling their dream of the promised land by stealing all that land from the Arabs in Palestine.

All three arenas of conflict are driven by a realist understanding of a sacred story. My understanding of SOF position is that it takes a non-realist, and non-literalist, view of sacred stories, which, I think, exist to deliver humanitarian values. As soon as they become badges of a tribe they can be a major influence to all sorts of the most desperate acts, causing untold suffering.

I am reminded of Harvey Cox's excellent book *The Secular City*, in which he says somewhere that 'the great challenge for the human race is to detribalise itself.' I suppose my dream is for this non-realist understanding of sacred stories to be released to the world, and particularly to politicians, so that it becomes fully globalised. So if we ask the question 'where do we go from here?', the answer might be that the Sea of Faith should work on a plan for a Peace Conference. This kind of project might be a move in the right direction. It is certainly solar. Perhaps it's time for SOF to come out to play.

*David Lloyd, 63 Halsbury Road, Redland  
 Bristol BS6 7ST.*

# From: The Verb to Be is Everywhere Irregular

Anne Ashworth writes: 'It was a new year, and I decided to start a reflective poem journal ... under an alphabetic discipline.' Her pamphlet *The Verb to Be is Everywhere Irregular* was published by Sea of Faith in 2003. Here we reprint 'N' for November.



Seems there's a need for nerve ends  
to nuzzle newness, brush the unencountered.  
Beware nettles, naturally.  
Nettles in spring are nourishing  
but this is not their season –  
for this is Now,  
a night in the ninth month,  
summer at nunc dimittis.

Take note of Now.  
Now is the only place the verb To Be  
has leave to be.

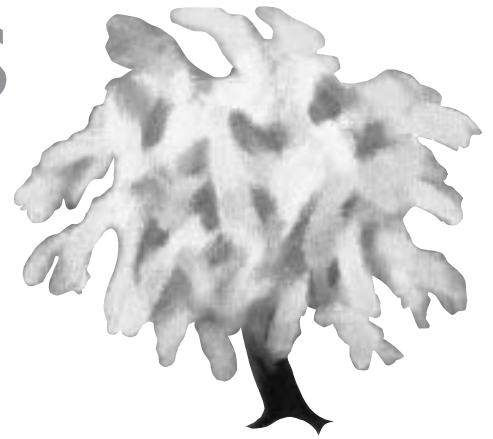
Never indulge Narcissus.  
Nostalgia will not do  
nor necromancy.

Nine o'clock news,  
naught for your comfort.  
Nails, napalm or the norms of need,  
it's crucifixion now.  
I name some known to me  
What demon angler nets them?  
Nemesis, born of night? – the only goddess  
some have encountered.  
Their nightmare is the nursery of tomorrow  
and new unthinkable normalities.



But no!  
There is another news,  
news of a further country,  
that nameless numinous  
realm that is not negation.  
May I be nuncio.

# Mayday Notes



For these occasional notes – grace notes with the occasional quaver or crotchet – I am adopting the pen-name Mayday because it is both a distress signal at sea and, on land, it is the spring holiday when the Earth is full of promise.

## The Limits of a Metaphor

was thinking about the metaphor of the ‘Sea of Faith’. It has proved a useful one, not only for the tide of supernatural faith receding, as in the original Matthew Arnold poem, but also for the idea of faith as a voyage of discovery. Thus W.H. Auden begins his poem ‘Atlantis’:

Being set on the idea  
Of getting to Atlantis  
You have discovered of course  
Only the Ship of Fools is  
Making the voyage this year  
As gales of abnormal force  
Are predicted....

and later in the poem he continues:

Remember the noble dead  
And honour the fate you are,  
Travelling and tormented,  
Dialectic and bizarre.

However, as in all metaphors the vehicle or image, in this case the image of the sea, the tide, voyaging, only partly corresponds to the tenor or what the metaphor is talking about, in this case, faith. They do not overlap 100%. To give another example, if I say ‘David is a lion’ (referring to one of my distinguished predecessors), where the vehicle is ‘lion’ and the tenor is ‘David’, I mean David has some of the qualities of a lion, but not all of them. I don’t expect him to eat me; I believe he’s a Quaker Attender!

Likewise the metaphor of faith as a sea or a voyage is illuminating but has its limitations. A traveller who was doomed to sail on and on and never land again was the Flying Dutchman and he was cursed. If discussions of faith are confined within this metaphor, they will share the limitations of its vehicle and many aspects and ideas will be excluded. Perhaps we also need other metaphors for other aspects, such as landing, putting our feet on the ground, building, getting our hands dirty, holding hands (as at Greenham) to say: ‘We shall not be moved.’

In SoF 66, Trevor Greenfield asks: ‘Is God actually an imaginative and poetic construction?’ Blake said so. Thinking about the uses and limitations of metaphor could also be fruitful here.

## Liturgy

Looking back on the final liturgy at this Summer’s conference, I was wondering why beginning it with a song saying: ‘Let nothing disturb you’ (cf. Jn 14:1) seemed to me a bit insipid, poetically unearned. Then I remembered that in traditional christian liturgies, the Eucharist, for example, ‘the peace’ or blessing is given or exchanged at or near the end. Is that because here liturgy is regarded as an action, happening, in which something is done, something happens? A sacrament ‘effects what it signifies’. Communion is not only ritually celebrated with the bread and wine but is also meant to happen among those taking part. And in the marriage ceremony the words ‘I will’ are performative. There is no reason why that kind of thinking need be confined to supernatural ceremonies.

I was re-reading Anne Ashworth’s interesting pamphlet, *The Elements of Worship: A New Look at an Old List*, in which she re-considers traditional items of christian prayer in a non-supernatural context. Her list is: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Intercession, Petition, Meditation, Dedication, Benediction (with blessing at the end). I think this list could be expanded, perhaps with some more symbolic and sacramental elements, such as ‘anamnesis’ (remembering) and communion. Ceasing to believe in a supernatural God does not mean people cease to want prayer and ceremonies. But can we create them with the power of the great traditions out of which we have come? Letters welcome.

I can’t resist one final note. At the end-of-conference liturgy the first hymn, *Nada te turbe*, was sung in Spanish and later another hymn had a rollicking German chorus: ‘Die Gedanken sind Frei’ (‘thoughts are free’). I looked round at all those sons and daughters of the Reformation, which struggled so hard for a liturgy ‘in a language understood by the people’; or perhaps some of them once catholics, who could remember the Sixties and the same struggle taking place at Vatican II in the Roman Church four centuries later. I could not help smiling to see them all singing away. It looked as though they were thoroughly enjoying themselves!



# Fahrenheit 9/11

Cicely Herbert reviews Michael Moore's documentary film on events following the election of President George W. Bush in 2002.



*Informed of the attack on the Twin Towers, President Bush reads 'My Pet Goat' to schoolchildren.*

In February 2003 millions of people world-wide took to the streets to protest against the proposed invasion of Iraq. This huge demonstration was ignored by those in power, and what followed has been the shameful destruction of historic cities and villages, the pollution of the land, the death of thousands of innocent people, and at the time of writing, the probable start of civil war in Iraq. Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is a brilliant documentary film, huge in its scale and shocking in its revelations about the self-interest of the Bush administration that led us into this war. (Interestingly, Tony Blair's role as Bush's side-kick is barely touched on).

The film begins with the United States presidential election in 2002 when the all-important results in Florida appear to have been fixed in favour of the Republican party. Although there were protests at the result, which was alleged to have disenfranchised many of the poorer citizens of Florida, Bush was declared winner after gaining a questionable victory by a margin of a few hundred votes, and duly became President of the USA. Throughout the film Bush and his cronies are shown as smug, wealthy, corrupt and as belonging to an enclosed circle of the elite. Much amusement is extracted from the numerous rounds of golf played by the president at times of crisis. The cosy connection between the Bush family and the Saudi Royal Family is made abundantly clear and can be traced back over many years to the time of the presidency of George Bush senior: the chief uniting factor being, naturally, oil.

Michael Moore's depiction of the bombing of the World Trade Centre is all the more powerful because of its restraint – we do not see the planes as they hit the Towers – the screen is left a terrifying blank and we hear the tragedy unfold as the towers collapse. We are informed – and the allegation has not, apparently, been refuted – that in the few days following the hijacking of the planes, although all other flights were grounded, members of the bin Laden family and other Saudis living in America were permitted to fly out of the country.

When Afghanistan was attacked in an attempt to rout out Osama bin Laden, the film suggests (and this is perhaps

far-fetched), that the country was targeted mainly for the opportunity to install a fuel pipeline through the land.

Some scenes from the war in Iraq are shown in sickening detail – Moore's choice of material has been criticised as being almost pornographic, but, is not the very subject – that of the mutilation and death through war, of children, civilian men and women and of soldiers – in itself pornographic?

The central story in *Fahrenheit 9/11* is of Lila Lipscomb, an ordinary patriotic working class woman living in Flint, Michigan, who proudly flies the American flag in her front garden and who believes that her son has enlisted in the US army to fight a noble cause. There are shots of smilingly persuasive men following young, unemployed and mainly black youths through bleak acres of parking lots, in a recruiting drive for the army where they will be assured of food and above all, a regular wage. After her son is killed in Iraq and Lila receives his last letter to her in which he expresses doubts about the validity of the war and his part in it, the mother becomes an impassioned anti-war campaigner, and visits Washington in an attempt to get her voice heard. It is here that one becomes uncomfortably aware of a stunt being performed, when Michael Moore becomes very much part of the action, handing out recruiting leaflets to senators as they go about their business and urging them to encourage their own children to do the noble thing and enlist in the army. It seems that at the time of the filming only one senator actually had a son fighting in Iraq. Whatever one's misgivings at the method, this brings one back to the central issue of the film: that it is the interest of those in power to continue to create wars in order to maintain the status quo and that it is always the poorest sections of the community who are enlisted to fight for their country and who will be offered as a sacrifice on the altar of war.

I am reminded of a poem by the First World War poet Siegfried Sassoon, 'The General':

'Good morning; good-morning!' the General said  
When we met him last week on our way to the Line.  
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,  
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.  
'He's a cheery old card,' grunted Harry to Jack  
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.  
But he did for them both with his plan of attack.

Cicely Herbert was one of the the Barrow Poets. Her poetry collection *In Hospital* describes her time in University College Hospital London after a serious accident. She is one of the trio that founded and continues to run *Poems on the Underground*.

# Tenebrae Responsories: A Sequence for Iraq

## by Kathleen McPhilemy

Tenebrae (Darkness) is the name given to the service of Matins and Lauds in the Catholic Church for the three days before Easter: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, because the candles lighting the service are gradually extinguished until it is completely dark. Responsories are a series of verses and responses sung after the Lessons of Matins.

### *Sicut leo in silva*

As the lion is lost in the forest,  
the dandelions are bright on the bank;  
he is the trees and the spaces between  
where the sunlight falls on his flank,  
he is the colour of last year's leaves.

The dandelions dance with the lambs  
and the grass is glossy and green,  
but the lion is parched in the desert,  
he has lost himself in the desert,  
his pelt is the colour of sand.

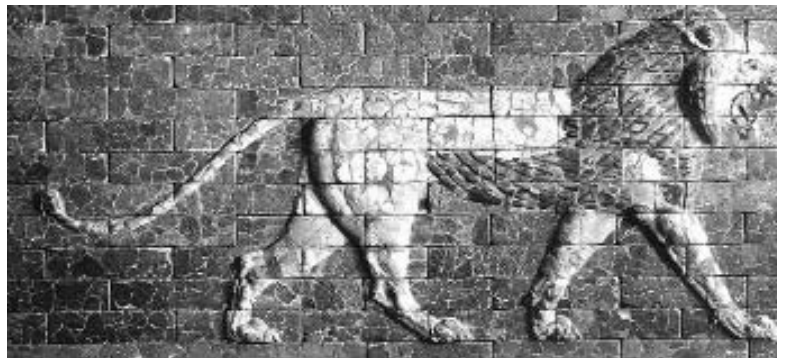
At the hour when darkness is made  
the desert is a forest of crosses,  
the lion dies with the lambs;  
though the dandelions are bright in the fields,  
the lambs are butchered and lost.

### *Sequebatur eum a longe*

We followed it all on television,  
watched, but from a safe distance.  
We can't understand the sorrow  
of the people in the land of broken things.  
There is a multiplication of Marys  
weeping at the doors of the morgues.

The people had walked in darkness;  
the light when it came was blinding:  
who can understand their sorrow?  
The people of the dolorous kingdom  
must live where one eye rules,  
where only one language is spoken.

There are children who have lost their parents,  
their brothers, their sisters, their arms:  
so much so intransigently broken.  
The barbarians are bewildered with sorrow;  
the brokenness of the dolorous kingdom  
resists them, resists their technology.



*Lion from the Ishtar Gate in ancient Babylon*

### *Hodie portas mortis*

They have been to hell and back  
but death is not defeated.  
Witness their harrowed faces  
as they set out to hunt through the corpses  
under the merciless Saturday sun.

The bodies are just as they fell,  
just as dead, and flyblown already.  
They do not expect resurrection  
only the decency of burial  
in the cool dark, underground.

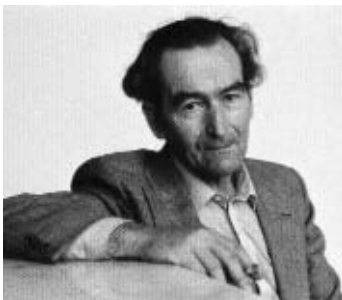
The prison doors are burst open,  
the doors of the banks and palaces,  
statues and idols lie shattered;  
but the hillside is stoppered with tombstones  
like white and motionless sheep.

Kathleen McPhilemy's latest collection of poems, *The Lion in the Forest*, has just been published by Katabasis (London).

# CONTINUITY AND RESISTANCE

## Michael Hamburger: the Poet as Witness

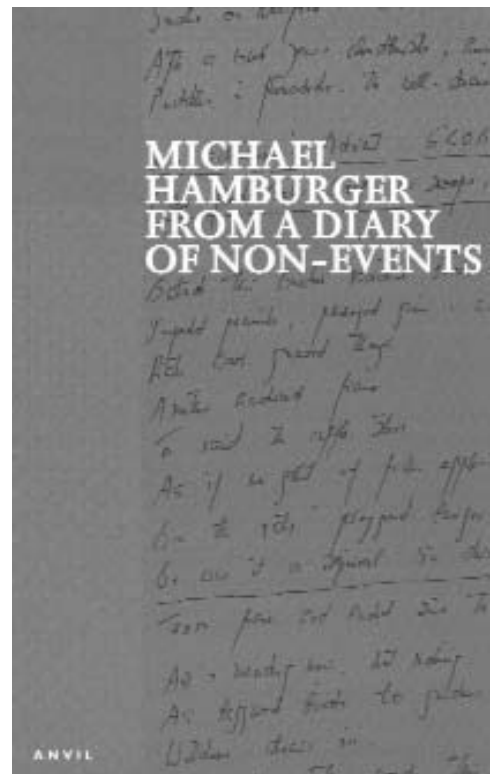
Christopher Hampton reviews Michael Hamburger's two latest poetry collections: *From a Diary of Non-Events*. Anvil Press, London 2002. 60 pages. £7.95. ISBN 0856463434 and *Wild and Wounded*. Anvil, 2004. 84 pages £7.95. ISBN 085646371X



Michael Hamburger has spent most of his life resisting the forces which, in a disastrous century, have dragged humanity and its civilizing energies into crisis after crisis. And his insistent probing

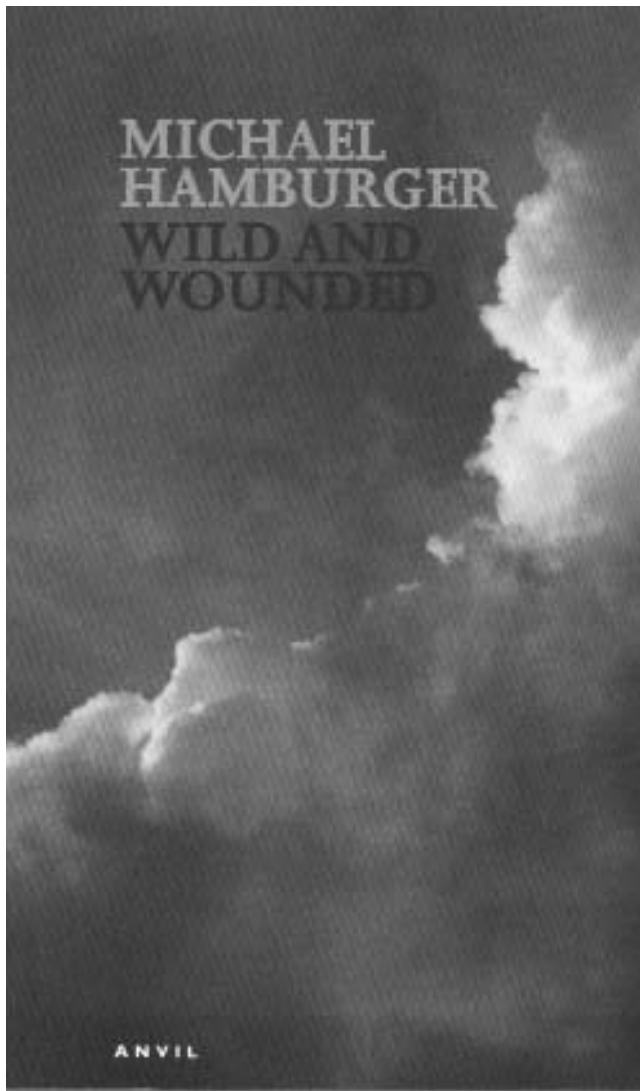
quest for an understanding of what it is that determines the place of poetry and the truth of poetry in this world has taken him deep into European culture, as poet, critic and translator. In *The Truth of Poetry*, for instance, his penetrating 1969 study of major American and European poets over the last hundred years, he writes with unillusive bluntness of the difficulties we face. 'What survived of the international humanism of the early 20th century' and its opposition to war he sees as 'a lost cause before the Second World War began; Spain and Munich had marked its defeat'. And he is pessimistic about the world we now live in, transformed by the consequences of the Cold War and the spectacular growth of the international money market, 'its incestuous procreation' and 'the manic fear' it breeds (*Diary*, 54), which has created new forms of destructive exploitation and violence.

Indeed, the two books under review – *From a Diary of Non-Events* (2002) and *Wild and Wounded* published this year to mark Hamburger's 80th birthday – continue to strike deep in demonstrating how exposed our world is to the forces of globalising power and their cynical indifference to the fragility and fate of the planet. Here, as in most of his work,



he takes his stand against these forces in defence of organic multiplicity, writing with tender solicitude of the natural products of the Earth, even as he laments the unreturnable losses of a betrayed past. 'Will immobility', he asks, 'lend you eyes that can see?'

Yes, inwards: whole streets demolished,  
Faces undone, empires, orders dissolved  
Locations, names mislaid, cities flown over, by-  
passed' (*WW*, 27)



And if 'poetry tells the truth, ambiguously', what it has to contend with are 'the lies which, like charity, begin at home' (WW, 31) in a world dangerously undermined by the agents of economic power, now engaged at huge cost in a destabilising 'war on terror' against the dispossessed.

The poems of *Wild and Wounded* seem, in contrast to those of either *Late* or the *Diary of Non-Events*, less unified, less resilient, more brittle, more mixed; but here too Hamburger bears witness to the underlying issues, the 'agony beyond words'. He knows, writing in April 2003 of the war in Iraq, that 'To walk immune here in the rising light, /Our pathways quiet, skyline not blasted black, /Was to be shamed by the sun's clear shining' (WW, 44). But *From a Diary of Non-Events*, like *Late*, has an altogether subtler, more integrated form and tone. It grows out of a single developing theme – swept through with echoes from the ravaged past and a sense of impending crisis. It is as if, around the images it conjures up of the changing seasons, storm clouds were gathering just beyond the horizon. And the irony of the title lies in the fact that the so-called non-events of the poem are themselves events which stand out against the intrusive and threatening events of the public world beyond them.

Each of its 12 sections – December to November – marks the shifting grounds of continuity and sanity, modulating constantly between hope and despondency, and maintaining an energy that gives momentum to the lovingly-named inventory of garden-life they are defined by the non-events of this Eden-world, 'Not yours, not mine', which we are custodians of and have responsibility for, even though it can never now be the kind of garden-world such a poet as Marvell celebrated in his poems. It is too late now for that. We are in a different garden, and 'the poisons are homing now' (D, 53). In that sense the poem seems more a lament, a litany of wrongs, listed with bitterness and rage, even as it celebrates the 'tokens... of cyclic return' (D, 24) where 'roses unfold millennial history' (29) and acknowledge the 'selfed' discoveries to be made in every season, there in 'the stillness that drowns events and non-events' as they are merged in 'recollection of a peace'(30). This double sense of gain and loss is there in the images and the rhythms of the verse, registering the intricate textures of reality which bind us to the continuities of daily experience we are surrounded by, as against the forces of hatred and of twisted truth, of 'power packed in lies' (53), that threaten our world and turn it dark, attacking the underlying structures that define our values.

All the same, this work, like many of the poems in *Wild and Wounded*, remains rooted in the humanist principles that affirm the energies of organic growth and renewal in resistance to the enemies of our 'one flora-bearing Earth'. And however difficult it may be to make our voices heard against these enemies, Hamburger does not doubt we must continue to speak out, in the knowledge that 'harsher winds.. can cleanse', and that where 'the riven sky shines' (D, 56), the civilizing light will be there, even as the Earth turns, to bring us hope and give us confidence to renew the struggle.

Christopher Hampton is a poet, critic and editor of the Penguin Radical Reader. He was a lecturer at the University of Westminster and the London City Institute and is now retired.

# Nezahualcōyotl

(Hungry Coyote) 1402-72, Poet, Philosopher, King of Texcoco

A brief introduction by Dinah Livingstone

Nezahualcōyotl, poet, philosopher, engineer, was king of the pre-conquest Mexican city state of Texcoco, a lesser state than the dominant Aztec Mexico-Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City). At the age of 16, he had to hide in a tree while he saw his father murdered by a rival claimant to the throne. (That was about 65 years from the date when the Princes in the Tower were murdered in England.) Young Prince Nezahualcōyotl was exiled for seventeen years and had to fight to regain his kingdom. Finally in 1431, he was crowned king of Texcoco by the senior king of Tenochtitlan. He made gardens and a zoological garden, in which he gathered all the region's fauna and flora; he built splendid palaces and courts, which he filled with poets. He became a famous law-giver. He constructed an aqueduct to bring water down from the mountain and a dike to separate the salt from the sweet water in the Great Lake, on which Tenochtitlan was built.

The name he adopted as a poet was Yoyontzin, -tzin being a Nahuatl diminutive rather like our -kin. So we could call him Yoyonkin. The Nahuatl word for poetry is in *xōchitl* in *cūicatl*: 'flower and song' and his 'flowersongs' celebrate the Life-Giver, the beauty and brevity of life on Earth and the joys of friendship. Together with the other poets at court, he delighted to take part in festivals and ceremonies with poetry, music and dancing. He had 119 children but only one legitimate heir, from his queen, when he finally got married. Around 1464, this son was found guilty of treason and his father, King Nezahualcōyotl, had to agree to his execution. The priests followed the Aztec ritual of human sacrifice to feed the Sun God, Huitzilopochtli, with blood so that it would continue to rise. To placate the God and seek a new heir to the kingdom they performed a great sacrificial ceremony. But Nezahualcōyotl rejected this God..

His name means 'Hungry Coyote' and he hungered for the Unknown God. The chronicler Ixtlilxōchitl says: 'He left the city and went off to his forest of Tetcotzinco,

where he fasted for forty days, praying to the Unknown God, creator and principle of all things.' Like the God of Quetzalcoatl (Feathered Serpent), ruler of the Toltecs, an earlier, famously high civilisation in the region, this Unknown God forbade human sacrifice.

Directly opposite the temple of the Sun God, Nezahualcōyotl built a temple to the Unknown God, which had no images in it at all and where human sacrifice was forbidden.. He was unable to rid his kingdom of human sacrifice altogether, as the powerful priestly class had too much invested in it. Like us, he

had to work in a complex and recalcitrant political context. But when there was a dedication ceremony of the Sun God's temple in the year ce ácatl: '1-Reed', he wrote a poem (correctly) prophesying the temple's downfall when the year 1-Reed returned after the calendar's 52-year cycle. That was 1519, when the Spaniards arrived in Mexico and Hernán Cortés began his conquest. The Sun-God's temple was indeed destroyed.

The Unknown God had no image. Thus Nezahualcōyotl reached him by a sort of *via negativa*. He calls the Unknown God the 'Life-Giver' and in his poems this Life-Giver sounds rather like Life itself. Honouring the Life-Giver means honouring life and giving up human sacrifice; his *via negativa*, a way of seeing, has ethical consequences.

I present here translations of three of his poems. Perhaps my favourite is 'You, Turquoise Bird'. Don Cupitt has written so well about life not just 'flowing' but 'shimmering', and I think this poem expresses that same insight most beautifully. Later Nezahualcōyotl's queen did have one more son, Nezahualpilli (Hungered-for Prince), who succeeded his father and followed in his footsteps as a philosopher, poet and dancer. There is a picture of him from the Codex Ixtlilxōchitl beside the first poem.



# POEMS BY NEZAHUALCÓYOTL

## I have come here, I am Yoyontzin

I have come here, I am Yoyontzin.  
I yearn only for flowers.  
I have come to cut flowers on earth.  
Now I cut precious flowers,  
now I cut flowers of friendship.  
They are your being, prince.

I am Nezahualcóyotl, king, I am Yoyontzin.  
I hasten to seek  
only your glorious song,  
and with it also I seek friends.  
Let there be joy here,  
let friendship be shown.

For a short time I delight,  
for a short time my heart  
is glad on earth.  
I am Yoyontzin:  
I yearn for flowers.  
I live by flowering songs.  
Greatly I desire and crave  
fellowship, nobility.  
I yearn for songs:  
I live by flowering songs.

Like jade, like a rich necklace,  
like proud quetzal feathers,  
I prize your song to the Life-Giver.  
In it I delight,  
with it I dance among the kettle-drums  
in the flowering house of spring.

I, Yoyontzin. My heart delights in it.  
Singer, beat well on your flowering drum,  
scatter sweet-smelling, white flowers,  
spread precious flowers,  
let them rain down beside the kettle-drums.  
Let us enjoy ourselves here.



*Prince Nezahualpilli dressed for a dance.*



*Quetzal bird*

## You, Turquoise Bird

You, turquoise bird, you roseate spoonbill,  
you go flying about.  
Self-Creator,  
through whom everything lives,  
you quiver, you beat your wings here:  
all my house, all my home  
is here. *Ohuaya. Ohuaya.*

By your kindness and your grace  
we can live, Life-Giver, on earth,  
you quiver, you beat your wings here:  
all my house, all my home  
is here. *Ohuaya. Ohuaya.*



Roseate spoonbill

## Are You Real?

Are you real (do you have a root)?  
The Life-Giver alone  
rules all things.  
Is this true?  
Perhaps it isn't, as they say?  
Let not our hearts  
be tormented!  
Everything that is true  
(has a root)  
they say is not true  
(has no root).  
The Life-Giver  
is just arbitrary.

Let not our hearts  
be tormented!  
Because it's the Life-Giver.



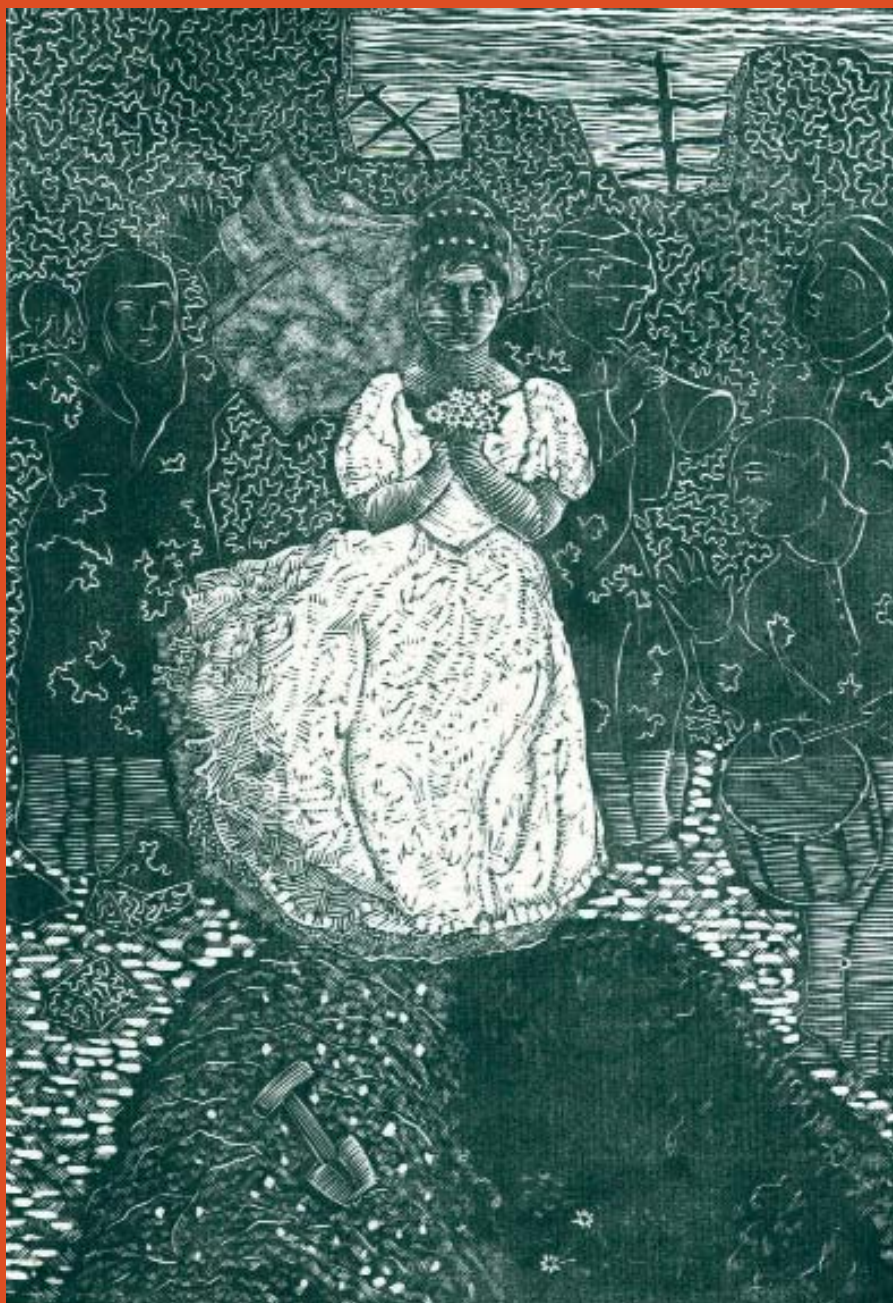
Humming bird

## Fragment of a Prophecy

In a year such as this one [*ce ácatl*]  
this temple now being dedicated  
will be destroyed.  
Who will be present then?  
Will it be my son or my grandson?  
Then the earth will fail  
and the lords will come to an end...

*'I Have Come Here' and 'You, Turquoise Bird' were translated from the Nahuatl into Spanish by Ángel María Garibay. 'Are You Real?' was translated from the Nahuatl into Spanish by Miguel León-Portilla and the prophecy by Alva Ixtlilxóchitl. English versions translated from the Spanish by Dinah Livingstone. 'You, Turquoise Bird' was also compared with original Nahuatl with the help of a Nahuatl dictionary.*

Wedding at Mukaradeeb (bombed by US planes killing 42 people).  
Woodcut by Emily Johns for Voices in the Wilderness,  
5 Caledonian Road  
Kings Cross  
London N1 9DX  
0845 458 2564  
Web: [www.viwuk.freemove.co.uk](http://www.viwuk.freemove.co.uk)  
Email: [voices@viwuk.freemove.co.uk](mailto:voices@viwuk.freemove.co.uk)  
JUSTICE FOR IRAQ'S DETAINEES  
A Speaking Tour by Peggy Gish, coordinator of the Christian Peacemaker Teams' Iraq Project  
12 -22 November 2004.  
For details contact Voices, as above.



## Celebration in May

A wedding of a lifetime  
a wedding to remember.  
All brides want that.

Let there be orange blossom,  
confetti, bullets in the air  
and the sun dry the tears  
of departing guests.

*Anne Beresford*