

For the disciples, the first Easter began in doubt and despair and led to joy and certainty. After they had seen the risen Christ they could never again doubt the power of God. As the writer to the Hebrews said of another group, they knew from experience that God's word is good. Yet, even though belief was sure, they still had to decide day by day to be true to the things Christ had taught and to obey the instructions of the Holy Spirit.

In this Easter issue people describe experiences of how faith in God grows as you aim to obey him, however difficult that may be.

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EASTER ISSUE

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King's College Chapel, Cambridge

A SAILOR'S STORY

Denis Foss

WHEN JOHN WAS BORN ILLEGITIMATELY his mother had already met a man she desperately wanted to marry, but was sure he would not marry her if he knew she had had a child.

John was cared for by relatives in another town until after his mother was safely wed and had moved to where her new husband worked.

John was then looked after by his maternal grandmother. This went well for a few years. However, Granny was a widow, still not 40 years old, and she in turn wanted to get married. So she placed John in an orphanage. She paid him

occasional visits, and had him home but he had become so morose and bitter it was no fun for her. In any case, she was busy with her new life.

As John was very able, at 15 he was sent away to sea as an apprentice deck officer on the advice of his headmaster. Luckily, at that time the Merchant Service was short of officers.

John did very well. He was a natural seaman, loved the sea, and worked hard to pass his certificates, which he did with some difficulty. His fellow officers respected him, perhaps liked him, but only the drunks and womanisers would go ashore with him—for, although it never intruded with his work, he was frequently drunk when he went to bed, and gravitated towards any prostitute who came his way.

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W. CAMBRIDGE JOHNSON

As soon as he got his Master's Certificate he was sent by his company to join the ship where I was the master.

I appreciated John's qualities but felt guilty as I could see no way of helping him to be free from his bitterness and his obvious unhappiness.

After six months John was due for some leave. When he came to say good-bye, I had been spending several desperate minutes in prayer and in quiet asking God for the words that might open John's heart to the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

But nothing seemed to come.

As we shook hands I said, as a desperate last resort, 'You know John when you get home you will have a lot of time on your hands and have nothing to do. If I were you I'd sit down and ask God why you are so bitter and how it can be cured.'

John looked at me with his head on one side and said 'What do you mean? I could only say, 'Try it and see what happens.'

Six weeks later I received a letter from him. After referring to some money matters, he said, 'I've had a hectic time, not in drink, don't think that, but in other matters. I shall try my best to give you a clear picture.'

Digs

He then described what had happened since leaving the ship. From his letter, and from later talks, I learned that he had gone back to his digs and found a note there from his girlfriend. She said that she was finished with him. He went to see her and had a long conversation with her. He could tell from her eyes that she did not want to stop seeing him, but she was all mixed up. He was upset and didn't know what to do so he went and got drunk and then went back to his digs and fell asleep.

When he woke up he said to himself, 'I've nothing to do, my girl doesn't want me. I have only drinking friends here. Oh hell!' He then remembered the chat we'd had, and he decided to try listening to God. He waved a finger in the

air and said, 'Hey, God, I mean the Captain's God, if you are up there, tell me what I should do. I am absolutely miserable and desperate, I can't go on like this.' No answer seemed to come, but in the middle of the night he woke up and the thought came, 'Go and see Madge and apologise for hating her all these years.' Madge was his grandmother.

John travelled the 50 miles to his grandmother's, but when he got there he walked up and down outside her house several times trying to summon up courage to knock on the door. Eventually the door opened and she came out and said, 'Is that you John, I've been watching you for some time. Why don't you come in.' They had not spoken to one another for a long time.

Peace

Over a cup of tea he eventually poured out what was on his heart and told her, 'I've come to make my peace.' They were together for about two hours. His grandmother sat for a few moments saying nothing. Then she said, 'You were quite right to hate me John. I was so full of selfishness I just wanted to get rid of you to procure my own happiness. The worst thing was I've been miserable myself about it ever since.' In his letter, John commented, 'We were together for about two hours, and she really showed happiness—and the weight of hatred for years came off my shoulders. I have offered to make peace with her man if he will meet me. I have told her any place, anywhere I am ready to make my peace.'

The next Monday afternoon his girl came to see him. After they had talked a bit, she asked him, 'Where were you at 11 o'clock on Saturday?'

John replied, 'It was about that time I was saying sorry to gran, why?'

She said, 'It was at that time that I was sitting having a cup of coffee on my own, when the thought came to me, something has changed deeply in John. You can go and see him again.'

Now they are happily married—and John is a captain. ■

'I WAS ABLE TO FORGIVE MY MOTHER IN TIME'

Lennart Sjögren, Sweden

IN MODERN SOCIETY WE FIND it almost impossible to have our old people living with us in our own homes. We put them in institutions—often with a twinge of guilt. In olden times we pushed them over a precipice—or they threw themselves over.

My sister Kerstin Gulbrandsen is a very active reporter and producer in the regional radio in Lapland, northern Sweden. Two years ago she felt the urge to care for our mother Greta, who was 91 years old. So Greta moved from Stockholm to share Kerstin's house in Arvidsjaur, just south of the Arctic Circle. My sisters and I supported this move.

For a hardworking professional woman like Kerstin it took guts to use all her spare time, including many nights, to look after a strong-willed old lady in a wheel chair who was getting increasingly senile. There was a never ending cycle of toilet chores, tooth cleaning, hearing aids, food, medicines, bed-making, answering calls. Then there was Greta's craving for affection and her habit of hiding her reactions with pious prayer instead of being honest about them.



Kerstin Gulbrandsen

As the tension between mother and daughter started to grow, Kerstin relieved her inner pressure by writing daily reports to Berit, a friend who works in the religious department of the national radio.

Greta tried to get Kerstin to pray. Although Kerstin respected Greta's own desire to pray she refused to be pushed into it herself. Greta would say, 'You don't want to say you believe in God, but I think you behave like a Christian.'

Then the deeper things in Kerstin began bubbling up—the way her mother had always dominated her, the tight grip around Kerstin's neck; the memory of how, 40 years ago, Mother had burnt the letters from the man Kerstin loved, and his picture. Kerstin had to write to Berit, 'I would push the wheelchair down the hill—and so in the precipice I would free myself. Let go, Mother! Face the truth! How could you do a thing like that? I would ask you to die, Mother. Let go of your grip!' But then came the nagging question, 'What have I done to my own daughter?' A connection was glimpsed. 'I burnt the hate away and beyond I found love,' Kerstin wrote.

Now Kerstin was in a position to help Greta face herself. Greta called her jealousy by its right name and became a free woman. Then Per, Kerstin's son, came to visit his grandmother and found her radically different. He read the reports his mother had written to Berit. 'Mother,' he exclaimed, 'you have got a book here! You must get it published.'

The publisher in Stockholm accepted it at once. *Precipice*, a story in short lines has been hailed in daily and weekly papers all over Sweden as a great help, through its honesty, in helping us face a difficult personal and social problem. *Expressen*, the biggest daily in Sweden, splashed across its posters: 'Kerstin in Arvidsjaur—I was able to forgive my mother in time'. Berit interviewed Kerstin on national radio. It is said to be one of the best programmes ever produced by the religious department. Libraries across the country have so far ordered 775 copies—an unprecedented total for a book classified as poetry.

But the thing which means most is the amount of proof that people have found the courage after reading the book to talk honestly with their parents, to break through the pretence and find new love.

I saw my mother three weeks before she died. What peace she had, what joy radiated from her! When she died I had a strong sense that death is a natural part of life. I felt so much at peace that it was only two weeks later that my feelings welled up and the tears came—whether of joy or sorrow I do not know. ■

JAMAICA JOURNAL

A young woman of 19 from Britain recently visited Jamaica. The following is an extract from her journal:

LORD, I FEEL SO GUILTY. Why do I have so much and others so little? How have I deserved the peace and security of knowing You, and having such a wonderful family when others have suffered so?

I see such need everywhere. I want to help but don't know where to begin. In Jamaica people go barefooted, and the hunger in the children's eyes cries out to me. And in other countries, the opulent luxury of so many can't conceal the hurts and dissatisfaction with material things; the hunger for something that money can't buy.

I love Jamaica. It's so beautiful! The sea is the brightest blue I've ever seen, and the white sand, and the swaying palm trees. In the mountains it's so green and fresh; and the people have such wonderful smiles, such big hearts, and eyes that really sparkle.

I admire what my hosts are trying to do. They live in this beautiful old colonial home, growing their own fruit and vegetables, raising a couple of pigs, a few cattle, some chickens. They have given much of their land to the nearby villagers. They have worked with the villagers in starting small cottage industries where people will work all night sometimes just to earn enough to live on. Now there is a community centre which is always open and where medical staff regularly visit. The women spin and sew, and sell their

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wares. There's a store where you can buy soap and toothpaste and old clothes. The government had to shut down the post office so the people built a new one, and now a market place....

To see a vibrant, new community—this is the vision the world needs. Concrete proof. Hope where there was despair.

We went into Kingston, a bustling, dusty, noisy city, bursting with people. Vendors, with their wares spread over every bit of pavement, beggars, a man with leprosy. Life is a hard reality for those with empty stomachs. Some have hate-filled eyes.

The young people we met tonight, what situations they face! A teacher whose pupils 'play' with guns. One went off in the classroom. Then my host suggested having weekends up in the mountains where those young people could go to gain strength, to seek Your will. If only they could find the accommodation... something simple—they would build it themselves.

But there is only \$5 in the fund. I've been so greedy, Lord. I've grumbled at not having all I wanted sometimes. At school everyone had so much—big cars, lots of clothes, stereos. I used to wish I had money too. But I've never wanted for anything I really needed.

Sitting there, longing to do, to say something of value, You told me, so clearly, out of the blue, to give £100—a gift I get once a year. I blurted it out without thinking, gave it all away. I must be mad!

But no! It wasn't my money to give. Everything I have is Yours. It was You who gave it, not me—that money to help build those rooms, for those young people, to help build a new Jamaica. £100 is so little really, though a fortune to me. How true it is that it is in giving that we receive. ■

Moving experience

Terence Goldsmith, retired publisher, Dorset

FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS my wife and I have felt it would be right, following my early retirement and now that our family have fledged, to move from our present biggish urban house by the seaside.

But where and when would God have us move? Our underlying conviction has been to trust and wait in the assurance that 'God sees around the corners' and that the right house would 'come through a person'.

During this period, I had built up in my mind a sense of hurt and injustice towards a former colleague about a financial arrangement. A few days before Christmas I felt I must write and ask his forgiveness for my feelings, though he was probably quite unaware of them. I had found it much easier to write a preface to a Christmas anthology about reconciliation than to make it practical on 20 December!

Yet, at this very time, a totally unexpected phone call came from a distant relative suggesting that we might make our home for the next few years on a family estate in a place we had never considered. It fulfils every dream in terms of location, facilities and potential friends.

For me it is further proof that 'there is no crown without a cross'. ■

The Rev ARTHUR BURRELL writes in the wake of the recent controversy within the Church of England in which a bishop's 'reinterpretation' of the resurrection and other central Christian doctrines received much publicity:

THE WISDOM AND THE POWER OF GOD

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY no shadow of doubt about the Easter message. It is short, clear, arresting and profound. It is at the heart of the faith of all the Christian communions. The ancient greeting of the Eastern Orthodox Church 'Christ is risen' is common to them all. This was not a belief that gradually grew within the circle of the church but was given to it by God and brought it into existence.

Familiarity often conceals the original meaning of ancient creeds. The cross, for example, became the symbol of this faith. In Roman times it was a dreaded instrument of torture and execution, yet it became the Christian sign of triumphant love and forgiveness due to the subsequent appearance to the disciples of the crucified Jesus as their risen Lord. This is a transformation we must not forget.

Attack

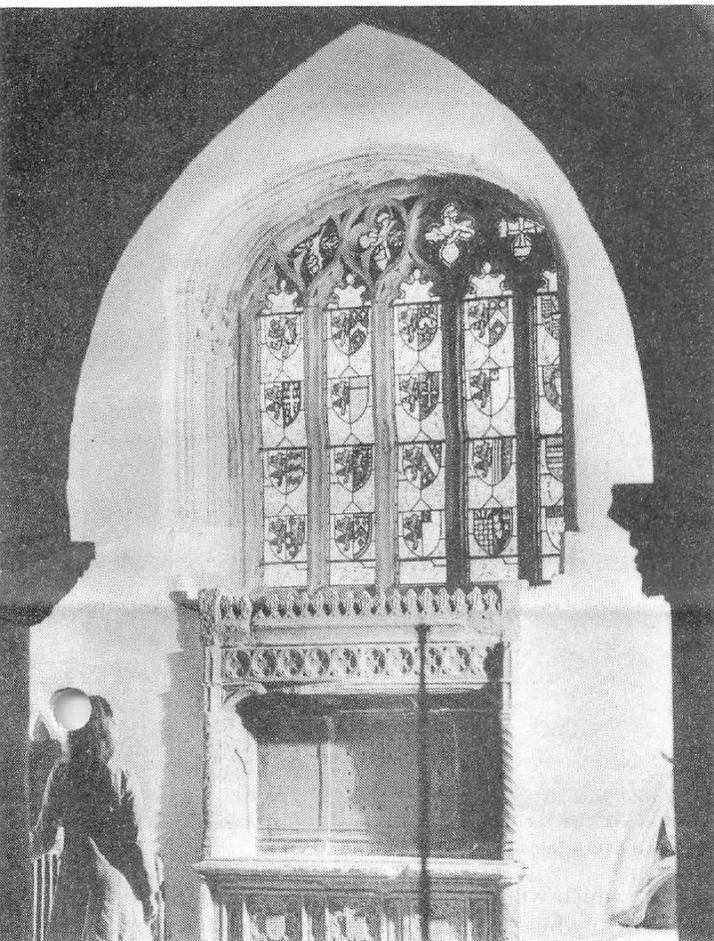
That such a faith has come under attack from earliest times is not surprising. The recent public controversy in church circles is nothing new. In the Christian life there is always a struggle, for laity and clergy alike, between the forces of good and evil, right and wrong, faith and scepticism. We witness to our convictions by the lives we live. Moreover, the resurrection should not be isolated from the rest of the Christian revelation but is the confirmation of it.

Discussions about Christian doctrine and the subsequent debate in the Synod of the Church of England have been conducted in the full glare of publicity on TV, radio and press—and inevitably have been sensationalised. Some of the speakers have used language which has been confusing to a public largely unfamiliar with current trends in New Testament study which have concentrated on the Gospels more as religious than historical documents—though, of course, they are both. Many scholars have come to 'shift the

Guardian

emphasis from the evidence of the empty tomb to the *personal encounter with Jesus*' (my italics) to quote from the late Professor C H Dodd's last book, *The Founder of Christianity*. It is, therefore, necessary for those who have the opportunity of expounding the Easter message on the media to learn how to do so simply, clearly and from their personal experience.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has spoken of a bishop's responsibilities of being both 'a guardian as well as an interpreter of tradition'. St Paul was an example of how to do this effectively. He described Christ, who had intervened so radically in his life, as 'the power of God and the wisdom of



British Tourist Authority

God'. This description rules out any attempt we may make to hold Christ up as an example of merely human power and wisdom. It demonstrates that our salvation does not lie in more science or more radical thinking, important as these are, but calls upon us to make the leap of faith and learn to let God be our guide.

In his book, *Summoned by Love*, Carlo Carretto of the Little Brothers of Jesus has warned us against joining in the many complaints or counsels of despair that we hear around us. His advice is not to keep on saying that everything is about to collapse, but to say, since it is nearer the truth, everything has collapsed already! 'You will find it', he says, 'much more cheering and rewarding to think of yourself as building for a new tomorrow than as defending a past already old and moth-eaten.'

Some years ago at a lunch party I was sitting opposite a bishop and a guest from Asia. The bishop was wearing rather prominently his pectoral cross. Before leaving the table my Asian friend said to me very earnestly, 'All through the meal I have been looking at that cross which the bishop is wearing. I used to hate the sight of it. For me it stood for "foreign churches" and Christians who made me and my people feel small.' He went on to say how he had grown to love it for he had recently met a group of people who had shown him that it stood for crossing out the 'I' at the centre of his life and letting God put his plan in its place. In this way he had found an answer to the resentment he felt for the past. His words were a simple expression of one way in which the cross can change both life and attitudes and pointed a lesson that all need to learn.

The Easter story tells us of men and women rescued from sorrow, doubt and despondency and totally remade—for example, Mary Magdalene, Thomas and Peter. With confidence in the risen Christ we too are meant to have the same experience. In this way, as new men and women we can create new nations, and new nations can give hope to the world. ■

THE CHILD AND THE WORLD

'... a young father drugged his beloved six-year-old daughter and then dropped her off the Severn Bridge. He told the police, "I had to do it. There was no future for her in this world, with drug addiction, prostitution and nuclear power. What a terrible world to bring up children."'

(London 'Daily Telegraph')

*It was a terrible world
And into it came a child
His mother sang for joy
The prophets had foretold
But he was not for the world
He was not hers to hold.*

*He grew in grace in lakeside Galilee
The Sabbath worship, shepherds and fisher-folk,
The pungent shavings planed from plough and yoke,
Lilies and birds, the market-place of men,
The lamp-lit home, seed-time and harvest. Then
The Baptist hailed him, and a dove descended.
Thirty years were ended.*

*Three more remained. A dark demonic world
None knew it more than he. Herod the fox,
The Baptist's head with stony steadfast eyes,
Jerusalem, the murderer of the prophets—
He wept most for the lost shepherdless sheep,
The famished, blind, maimed, sick in body and soul,
Emptying himself to make them whole.
They followed him then fled. The twelve he chose
Wavered: one broke, one sold him with a kiss.
Hand-washing Pilate squirmed, made efforts, buckled,
His job being on the line, and Rome relentless;
Wrote 'King of the Jews' and handed the prisoner over
To a criminal's death.*

*He, hanging, saw his mother with his friend
At the cross's foot: 'Mother, behold your son.'
Six torturing hours
'Father forgive, they know not what they do'
Then it was done
His Father's will, in heaven on earth,
That man with God and man be reconciled
The meaning of his birth.*

*A terrible world it was
Into it came a child.*

copyright Michael Thwaites

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THE CHALLENGE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Reviewed by Erik Andren

FOR THE SOUL PARCHED by all attempts to grasp insight into Northern Ireland's passions, this booklet is cool water. Like Ireland's mists it moistens whole tracts of new thought and potential. Suddenly in the chaos of the Irish past and present one sees green shoots, mere buds, but heralding what yet could be.

The authors command attention for their experience, involvement and representative diversity, but also for their closely related approach. Here are cords of honesty and filaments of hope from which trust could grow, yet unlike proposals made by 'interested parties' these writers stand in the open to address realities, without reserving sectarian ground.

An English bishop explores and faces England's part in the present situation. John Austin Baker, the Bishop of Salisbury, talks of the need to distinguish between myth and legend and the facts as research discovers them. Having done so, he says, 'forget the myths, because the truth is bad enough'. He explores the concepts of just anger and corporate responsibility. 'By failing to disown (the wrongs of our forebears) we identify ourselves with former crimes and must stand in the dock with those who committed them.' Only an approach that understands, accepts and repents for the past can hope to succeed.

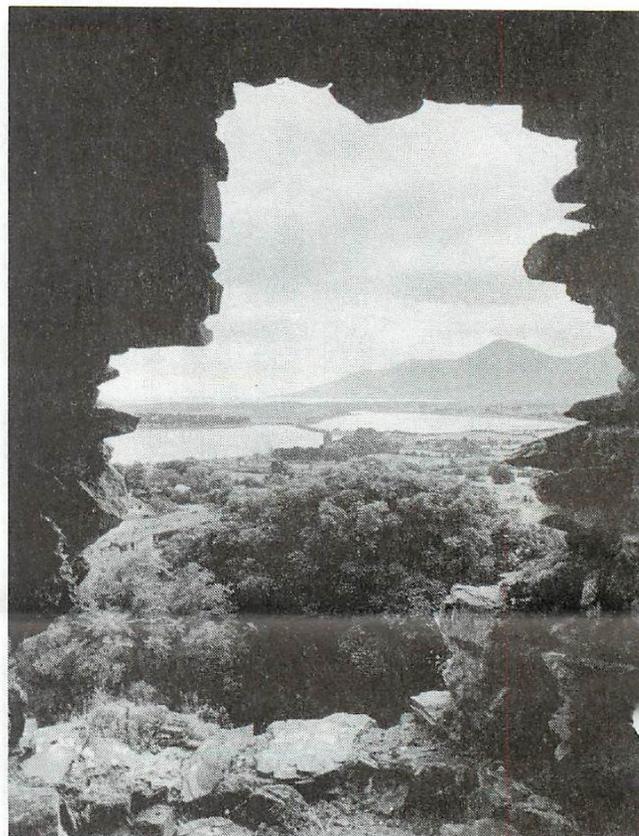
Sensitive political pointers are outlined by Kenneth Whitaker, a senior Southern public servant, seeking flexibility for North-South relations. He hopes for a freely chosen united Ireland eventually but recognises that 'while the aspiration to unity is strong in the South, we... are little prepared for such an eventuality...' If there is ever to be unity the Republic has a 'responsibility to create conditions favouring acceptance by that majority (in Ulster) of an Irish alternative to continued membership of the United Kingdom.'

Framework

Some intermediate solutions must be found in order to allay the principal fears of political, religious and economic domination that afflict both sides in the Province. He sets out simple principles essential for such intermediate circumstances and concludes, 'if, through all concerned being more reasonable and flexible, an intermediate arrangement can be made which brings peace to Northern Ireland... a framework would have been established in which divisive issues could be resolved by free and informed majority decision.'

Striking parallels between Northern Ireland today and the experiences of the disciples that first Easter are illuminated by a Catholic moral theologian, Father Enda McDonagh. Jesus was followed, but without much understanding. His disciples 'boasted, quarrelled and even deserted. It took the Cross' to make them the disciples they were to become. They had to experience the Calvary challenge to fully understand what being Christ's disciples entailed.

The writer calls for Christian discipleship broader based than the sectarian churches and proposes a 'quasi-religious



Mourne Mountains, Northern Ireland

order... which will lead the way for the churches and the politicians', where the call to Christ is to risk all and promote 'the new creation of Irish society in the graciously divine manner revealed in Jesus Christ.'

'Without repentance we perpetuate violence. Are we the ones who should be in Long Kesh (prison)?' asks George Dallas, a Presbyterian Belfast consultant, examining Protestant attitudes. 'Over the centuries we have willingly been the tools, the dupes, the catspaws of England in her wrong policies.' 'We became an effective garrison for England, and willingly took on the task laid upon us of "civilizing" the Catholic Irish and keeping them in their place.' But 'nobody has told us we are no longer the garrison.'

Many Protestants, writes Dr Dallas, 'continue to cling rather desperately... to their sense of being British'. Yet the fact is that 'perhaps 70 per cent of our ancestry at one time spoke Gaelic.'

'Peace and justice will never be established in Ireland unless we repent,' he says. For him, 'repentance leads to the sense that I and my community must become Irish.' 'When we Protestants are wholly prepared to live as Irish in Ireland we may find the compassion to understand our Catholic fellow-countrymen.' This will involve the 'enormous' risk of ceasing to exist as a community, 'but the risk must be taken'.

'There are some... who in order to throw off tyranny, anger themselves to the point of seeing nothing in the tyrant except the tyranny,' says Cormac O'Connor, a 'Southern Irish Catholic', in a glorious letter that fills and sings. 'We are the Anglo-Irish,' he affirms. 'We draw now on two traditions.' Those who deny one tradition are holding back the stream that is taking them forward to the meeting of waters and a new reality. 'Ireland is the meeting place of waters, the place where... streams turbulently co-mingle to create this new reality.... Even while the tribal intransigents...

hold on with blind obduracy to old and worn out themes, at this very hour, the green shoots of the new reality are already emerging.'

These fifty or so pages on Northern Ireland can have few rivals in the quality of their insights or the clarity with which they illuminate ways forward. ■

'The Challenge of Northern Ireland' is published by the Furrow Trust, Maynooth. Copies may be ordered from: The secretaries, 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF, price 70p including postage.

Saidie Patterson— 'an outstanding woman of our time'

Irene Massey

Must this wickedness continue
In the land in which we live?
Fill us, Lord, with Thy compassion,
elp us, Jesus, to forgive.

Sin sick souls are all around me
Men whose hands are stained with blood,
Planning evil every moment,
Knowing nothing of Thy love.

Yet for them there is a message—
Jesus died to set men free,
Those who trust will be forgiven
Now and through eternity.

The above verses are from a poem which Saidie Patterson wrote to her friends a couple of years ago. She herself knew the secret of forgiving and of being forgiven. To the end of her life, in January this year, she fought to pass that secret on to others.

Saidie had much cause for bitterness. Her mother died because they could not afford a doctor, leaving a baby sister three days old in Saidie's care. Saidie was 12 then and she had to become the breadwinner for the family for her father came an invalid as a result of the shock of her mother's death. Her brother had to emigrate because he could not get work in Ireland and he was denied assistance from the state.

Saidie fought resolutely for the rights of the workers. She led the biggest ever strike in the textile industry of Northern Ireland. She was given the task of organising the workers into a union by Ernest Bevin (later Foreign Minister of Britain). She became the first woman official of the Transport and General Workers Union and the first woman Chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

Through it all her deepest bitterness was towards the employers. In 1946 she attended the international conference of Moral Re-Armament at Caux, Switzerland, and met Frank Buchman who began MRA. She described that as 'the most important meeting of my life'. One of the hardest decisions she made on her return to Ireland was to apologise to an employer whom she felt was ninety-nine per cent to blame for their division. After three days' inner struggle she apologised for her 'one per cent' and a new era

began in her life. Saidie had found the cure for bitterness. She continued her fight for the workers in a new spirit. She was decorated by the Queen for her work for the women of Northern Ireland. When the Queen asked her how things were going with the women, Saidie made a characteristic reply, 'Well, Ma'am, once our women were just pairs of hands. Now, Ma'am, they are royal souls just like yourself.'

The answer Saidie had found to bitterness was to stand her in great stead during the following years when violence broke out in Northern Ireland. By now, she had supposedly retired. Again she went into action and spent her days building bridges between the different communities. Her life was threatened and on one occasion she was badly injured so that she walked with crutches from that time on. That did not deter her. She spoke to countless meetings and her greatest joy was to address young people, like sixth formers—she loved all young people, 'our stakes in the future'.



Saidie Patterson from Belfast

Speaking on the Northern Ireland *Thought for the Day* BBC Radio programme in January, the Rev Gordon Grey said that Saidie 'had graced a world-wide stage; yet she never moved from the house where she was born. From that tiny home her name and influence spread quite literally around the globe... Here were her people, here her city, here the province and the land where she belonged. Yet the world acknowledged her stature and claimed her as its citizen: the World Methodists with the Peace Medal in 1978; and the United Nations in the International Year of Women named her "one of the 50 outstanding women of our time". In her own life, she wove together in an exquisite pattern the sometimes severed strands of justice and of peace, of warm evangelical faith and wide ecumenical vision, of spiritual depth and social concern, of fearlessness and compassion.' He ended by quoting a letter Saidie had written him in which she said, 'We know that obedient men and women are God's tools uplifting an unruly but potentially great humankind.' ■

KEIR HARDIE VIDEO SPECIAL OFFER

There is still time to order the video based on Henry Macnicol's play, 'Keir Hardie—the man they could not buy' at special prices which are valid till 31 March 1985.

PAL video (UK, Australia, New Zealand, S Africa, Zimbabwe) £40
NTSC video (Americas, Canada, Japan) £85

Order from MRA Productions, 12 Palace Street, London SW1E 5JF, stating whether VHS or Betamax video cassette is required. (Cheques payable to MRA Productions.)

FRANCE AND GERMANY— DARING TO TRUST

THOSE WHOSE TASK IT IS to build up Europe today show a discouraging pessimism, both in private and, alas, in public. Europe is marking time while each country congratulates itself on being more European than the others.

In this period of stagnation and doubt, where can we look to refind the lost momentum? In the first place, to that almost miraculous factor without which no reconstruction of Europe would have been possible: Franco-German reconciliation.

Such is the conviction that impelled French and Germans to meet from 15-17 February in the little Rhine town of Rastatt. The first objective was to form personal friendships as a preliminary to any common action; next to evaluate the state of the reconciliation, and finally to gain clear perspectives for the future.

The 120 who met came from the Ruhr and Nantes, Lyons and Berlin, Frankfurt and Paris or Bonn. Few were well-known. Most were ordinary citizens.

The welcome given by the Mayor, Herr Mockert, confirmed how greatly the French and German races had affected each other over the centuries. Louis XIV was the sponsor of the charming Rastatt castle, which was built at the end of the 17th century by order of Margrave Louis William of Baden, who had himself been educated in Paris at the wish of his Savoyard mother.

Rastatt, which has always been a garrison town, today houses 4,000 French soldiers—and a single German soldier, who guards the museum!

Reconciliation

Franco-German reconciliation was in fact the fruit of costly decisions—such as that of Irène Laure, Resistance fighter from the south of France, who travelled through post-war Germany, winning thousands of Germans to the spirit of reconciliation by apologising for her own hatred. 'Mme Laure's gesture,' said a German woman who had met her in 1947, 'was like an open door to a future in which we no longer believed.' Costly decisions, too, like those taken by French people who had lost 10, 15 or 20 of their families in concentration camps and who built everything on forgiveness. Some such were present at Rastatt.

But today, as Frau Gisela Oberländer, West German historian and political analyst, emphasised, 'We cannot consider reconciliation as a definite attainment. Each generation has to make it its own. We have to take the risk of trusting each other, as our parents did after the war.'

Frau Oberländer described a recent conversation with a Frenchman who had said: 'I don't care about Franco-German reconciliation. It seems superfluous to me. I don't

hate the Germans. I'm simply indifferent to you.' After feeling hurt by that remark, she had realised the importance of having the courage to face honestly what the other nation feels. She sees that as the only way of moving from indifference to respect for our differences.

Another aspect of Franco-German relations came up. It concerns the burden of the past. It is well known that some German adults sometimes find it difficult to hold up their heads, overwhelmed as they are by the guilt of the Hitler era, whilst some of the youth feel cut off from any patriotic or cultural root. A Frenchman expressed his conviction that there was no reason for one nation alone to take all the blame. Another Frenchman, an official of the European Community, stated: 'As French and Germans we must feel jointly responsible for our joint culture and history.'

Relaunching

What can we do towards the spiritual relaunching of Europe was the key question of the days at Rastatt.

Perhaps it is difficult to turn the scales against the Europe of lawyers and diplomats. 'But,' stated Didier Lazard, a former lecturer at the Institute of Political Sciences in Paris, 'there is also a Europe of public opinions, and there we have a part to play. Individually we do not look much. In reality we are the warp and woof of this undertaking. We are responsible for the Europe of souls.'

Herr Corterier, a Member of Parliament for Karlsruhe, cited two areas in which prejudices need to be stamped on: 'The French must stop believing that Germany is only a protective glacis and that the real defence line should be on the Rhine. The fate of the two countries is irreparably linked. In return, the Germans, and above all the directors of the Federal Bank, must stop thinking that they are the only ones to understand European monetary reality and propose solutions.'

For Daniel Dommel, a senior French official, the primary values are those of a moral order and it is they that can produce the most movement. He believes that the main question is to find what can strike the collective imagination of the European nations for, he stated, 'the obstacles and delays to be surmounted are greater when you want to advance a little than when you want to advance a lot.' He also warned, 'If a new impulse is not given, I am afraid that the achievements of the last 30 years will be frittered away.'

M Dommel believes also in the necessity of keeping mind the calling of our continent with regard to the world. 'Our allegiance to Europe,' he declared, 'must not rule out our feeling of belonging to the human family.' After asserting that we must 'guard against a nationalism that is jealous with regard to the United States, chilly with regard to the countries of the East and indifferent with regard to the countries of the South,' M Dommel insisted on the need to determine attainable aims which would demand 'the fewest institutional reforms and the greatest change of mentality'.

From an article in 'Changer' by Jean-Jacques Odier.
Translated by William Stallybrass

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