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OF

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# Courage

Take courage.

It is the key to life. It is common and it is rare. It is often extraordinary, but more often simply essential.

There is the courage to defy your shyness, step out and meet new people, go to a cocktail party where you know no one, to try a bus route which you have not been on before.

There is always the risk of being foolish.

Some people need courage to speak in public; some, perhaps, need the courage to be quiet.

There is the courage to be found out, to tell another person what you are really like, and to confess what you are most ashamed of. Courage is needed to pay back the money for the book you stole from the shop next door.

There is the courage to stick to your priorities in life.

Then there is the courage neither to be frightened by tiredness nor by free-time.

There is the courage of those who fight disabilities, and who suffer from disease or handicap. There is the courage to see another's suffering, and not to close your heart, or get sentimental. There is also the courage to recognise your own suffering, and accept it. That is the key to courage: never to close your heart, under any circumstances. Hurt and wounded you may be, but never close your heart! Perhaps, you will wear your heart on your sleeve.

There is the courage to stand up for what is right and be laughed at for it. Or to stand up for what is right and be misunderstood, even by your friends. Courage is to accept failure with grace, to know that life is to do your best, to love with all your strength and to give with all your heart. And, then, there is the courage not to hide your talent just in case you fail.

There is the courage to meet your fears on the high field of battle, and never to leave the field until they have been vanquished.

Courage is never to adjust your beliefs to accommodate the cynic. The cynic is always intimidating, but do not be intimidated. The cynic is in a hurry for results. The courageous man can bide his time.

There is the courage to sacrifice your life for others. And there is the courage never to make your sacrifice your security. God is the only security.

There is the courage to wait for God's gift.

History is full of courageous people. Look at people not by their successes, not by their rules; look at them by the courage with which they faced the challenges that confronted them; look at them by their determination to hold on to the dreams God gave them.

Most of all, there is a courage to live alone with God. A great saint said: "If I could only teach you to live alone with God, we would change the world."

Take courage, and take your courage.

*The Editors*



# MALAWI MOODS

by Alan Channer

## MALARIA

The fever starts to sing in your veins and the heat to glow in your feet; the sweat breaks and your mind slides.

Oh African fever, come! Float me like a bird on an updraught; swing my being into the clouds.

Oh God, the hotter, the further out I'm drifting, the nearer I feel you. If I were to expire now in a profusion of perspiration, I know I'd be dropping like a feather into your Nothingness, melting into your Fire like a meteorite in the sun. I'd be ready, with just one thing left to say:

"Oh my parents, oh all who've loved me, THANKS!"

## NEW YEAR

The end of the decade wasn't that felicitous. My companion complained of malaria, the water supply was cut off and some of our food was stolen.

I went out into the deepening dusk to listen for hyenas. But New Year's night came on heavy and still. Only crickets sang. There'd be no other music tonight, no party, no shower even.

I collapsed under the mosquito net, began my prayers and woke up later wondering if I was

still half way through. Some rodent scratched about in the roof. Stars glinted through the insect screening. It was a new decade. A hot, sticky, isolated, basic opening.



And magical. I was where I would have chosen to be; free to roam in an African wilderness; free to roam amongst my doubts and ideas; to walk amongst buffaloes; to lie up at waterholes and watch the thoughts come and go in my mind like the shy antelopes and the green snakes.

Could I live like this? Should I? This new decade, what would it bring me? No, how could I give it my best?

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## THE OPEN BOOK

*Be an open book my friend  
Where all may come to read a tale of life.  
A book that doesn't close its covers  
Out of fear of what another will see inside,  
But even if mistakes are there  
Will keep it open wide.  
When everyone's the same there's naught to hide  
But all to use with all and each and everyone  
you meet,  
That likewise you may open up a door.*

*Some book have steel covers - made of hate,  
With your open book you'll show them  
That it's not too late to start again.  
Some books have covers made of gold  
and precious things,  
Your open book can show that only  
Real treasures last that are within.*

*Some books are bound with cloth and sticky  
tape -  
Soft cloth will not stand alone  
And flops and falls on others for security.  
Your book can show where true security lies.  
Not in other books,  
But in the backbone of your own,  
That keeps you straight,  
And in the Master Binder who made you  
And in Whose Library you live.*

*The cover of your book may wither, fade or  
tear.  
But what is written in will last forever -  
Read and reread,  
An ever-changing, growing story of life,  
A life lived, given, used for others -  
And treasured up among the books of Heaven.*

Elizabeth Lester



# CHARM NEEDS

THERE WAS A GREAT Anglo-Saxon poem called *The Dream of the Rood*, by an unknown author. I have just rediscovered it for myself. The rood is the Cross. Suddenly, it speaks:

*I was deemed in former days the direst  
of torments,  
I was hated and abhorred until I made  
a highway,  
The right way of life, for the human  
race.  
Lo, the King of Glory favoured me  
above all the trees of the forest.  
Death He drank there; yet from death  
the Lord arose  
With might and power to be man's  
helper...  
He will ask in sight of many where is  
the man  
Who for the Lord's sake would give up  
life,  
Drink bitter death as He did on the  
beam...  
But none need be afraid to abide His  
appearing  
Who has borne in His bosom this  
brightest of beacons.  
For through this Cross shall come to  
the Kingdom,  
From this earthly life, each and every  
soul  
Who longs with his Lord to live in  
life everlasting.*

The poem goes on:

*Then I prayed to that blessed Beam...  
I live my life in hope  
That I may trust and seek that Tree of  
Triumph,  
Alone honour and serve it above all  
others  
This is my heart's desire; in this is  
my delight.*

The hymn which begins: "When I survey the wondrous Cross", has been a favourite for people for three centuries. It ends: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all".

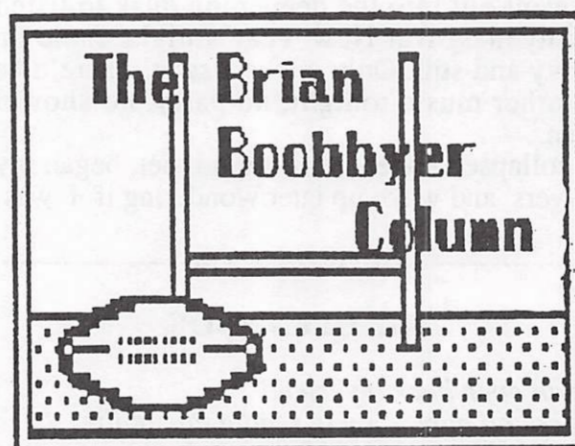
It was Gandhi's favourite.

One of his grandsons, Ramchandra Gandhi, renowned philosopher, once

told me that when his grandfather stood before the cross in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, he wept and wondered if he might be asked to make a similar sacrifice. The Mahatma wrote later: "I saw at once that nations, like individuals, could only be made through the agony of the Cross and in no other way."

Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, is a must for anyone who seeks to be a nation-builder. He writes: "To see the universal and all-pervading spirit of truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to truth has drawn me into the field of politics. Identification with everything that lives is impossible without self-purification. I must reduce myself to zero."

Purity is the Cross. It is the road of obedience. Charming people without the Cross only draw people to themselves.



It is not that I deliberately choose the difficult road. But I reject the ways of the world which put me in the centre of things: my success, my glory, my fulfilment.

The disciples of Christ at the beginning of their three years' training had to give up all they possessed. Only at the end of their time did they begin to give up themselves. In fact whenever Christ mentioned the Cross, they began fighting Him or each other. They held to



# A CROSS

the idea that His Kingdom would be political not spiritual.

Michael Green in his book, *To Corinth with Love*, wrote: "The Cross is the corrective for false ideas of leadership."

I remember first taking God seriously in my life when I was confirmed in the church at 14. In a general way I gave my life to God and began to walk a new road. Then when I was a student at 22, the road became more definite. I was confronted with a challenge to give my will to Jesus Christ.

I love that word of the sixth century Irish monk, St Brendan: "If you become Christ's man, you will stumble on wonder upon wonder and every wonder true."

Living at the Cross, walking the road of purity, means I can genuinely love people. The Pope said: "You either love people or you use them. If you love people you make friends, if you use them you make enemies."

## *Dare to be love*

The French 19th century saint, Charles de Foucauld, wrote: "To love anyone is to hope in him for always. From the moment we begin to judge anyone, to limit our confidence in him, identify him with what we know of him and so reduce him to that, we cease to love him, and he ceases to be able to become better. We should expect everything of everyone. We must dare to be love in a world that does not know how to love."

Only the Cross can enable us to express that kind of love.

St Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Do nothing in a spirit of selfish ambition and in a search for empty glory. Do not concentrate on yourself and your own interests." Concentration on self inevitably means to eliminate others.

Unity grows from the Cross.

I'm always reading through the Psalms and discovering verses that I've missed. Recently I found this in Psalm 26: "I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass thine altar, O Lord, that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all thy wondrous works."

Wash, worship, publish, thank God.

Washing myself enables me to become a cleansing force. Listen to this word from Amy Carmichael, missionary and writer earlier this century:

"Very earnestly I would say to anyone who is responsible for the purity of a work, at all costs keep it pure. To do so would cost far more than you dreamed it would, Do not falter. To falter is to sap the very foundations of that which was committed to you to guard. Cost what it may, resolve to build only precious stones into your garden wall."



As you look at the future, marriage, career and the long adventure ahead, I would make a suggestion. Sit quietly and unhurriedly before a crucifix or a picture of Christ on the Cross - maybe in a chapel - and think on these words of an old hymn:

*This hast Thou done for me -  
What have I done for Thee,  
Thou crucified?  
I long to serve Thee more;  
Reveal an open door,  
Saviour, to me;  
Then, counting all but loss  
I'll glory in thy Cross,  
And follow Thee.*

Easter is approaching and it is a good moment to think on these things.

Let me close with the words of William Penn: "No Cross, No Crown."



# IN AT THE DEEP END



by Su Riddell

DO YOU FIND exercise boring? On your own, I mean. Something you can do regularly.

I've taken up swimming. I go to the municipal pool. Municipally cold. Not like hotel pools. They're kept at a nice steamy heat, perfect for relaxing in. The Municipality has provided a pool for exercise, and exercise you shall have. You keep going because it's the only way to keep warm.

A year ago I was fitting 14 lengths into half an hour. I can only cope with half an hour before my brain gets cramp from the boredom. Now I can do 20. You see, even you can get fit.

There is a little entertainment to be had. First there is the slalom course. Having to swim, like most other people, out of working hours, I find most of the neighbourhood have got there before me. At least, most of the neighbourhood teenagers. They like to bounce up and down in little groups, sprinkled evenly through the pool like strawberries in jam. Just as you draw alongside, one of them crash-lands right ahead of you, causing an instant alteration of course.

Sometimes a path is carved through all this by the splashers and the chatterers. The splashers are youngish men who think it's macho (so old-fashioned) to plough up and down doing a crawl that puts Niagara to shame. Chatterers are elderly ladies who spend the whole evening gently drifting from one end to the other, with no visible means of propulsion. They exercise their tongues. Pieces of intriguing conversation drift over: "She's having them out next week...."

Do not stand at my grave and weep  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the mornings hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
I am not there; I did not die.

I've given up the nearest city's leisure pool. It ought to be X-rated. The things people think they can do under cover of water. What cover? And I can't stand being eyed up and down. Bits of me are fat. It would be more polite to look away.

It's all quite different from the big inner city pool where I used to go, before we moved to these rural parts. It seems hard to believe now, but I used to go twice a week, at 7.30 am. Was that really me? Anyway, it was always full of cool commuters on their way to work. Everyone swam up and down in well-ordered stripes. Two lanes were marked out for the speeders, who either didn't splash much, or kept it to themselves. Nobody ever spoke a word. The silence was eerie. It was like one of those scenes from a sci-fi film. Even in the changing rooms people never spoke. Some day when I'm big and bold, I'm going to go back there and say "Good morning" to everyone I pass.

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## FORGIVE AND BE FREE

"AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, as we forgive our debtors..." How many times had I mechanically repeated those words without understanding the depth of their meaning!

I had recently completed two years of residency training in General Surgery, and looked forward to the last three years of sub-specialisation. The first six weeks seemed more like vacation than work. Soon I was familiar with the basics, and felt ready to progress. Yet coupled with the excitement of each new achievement was a growing impatience with myself and others.

After months of preparation I was promised the opportunity to play an integral role in the next major procedure. However, when the long-awaited morning finally arrived, I was left alone to man the clinic. I was disappointed and spent the remainder of the day nursing a righteous anger against my colleagues.

That evening I ran across an unfamiliar title on the bookshelf, *Forgive and Be Free*, by Richard P Walters. As I read it I became aware



# Franco-German Weekend

by Ulrike Ott

"WHAT DO WE ACTUALLY know about our neighbours?" was one of the many questions of the French-German Youth Meeting in Buhl... and after the weekend we definitely knew more about them than before. We were 35 people who met in a Catholic conference centre near the French-German border. We started on Friday evening with a "brainstorming" about the prejudices against French or Germans. The results the three groups (French; German; and 'Neither-Nor' - Lebanon, Finland, Korea, Tunisia, Switzerland and Belgium) shared were partly surprising and amusing because sometimes they were exactly the same, and sometimes exactly the opposite.

On Saturday morning a report was given about the current situation in Germany, France and each country that was represented. For me as a German it was particularly interesting to hear about Korea, itself a divided country for many years.

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*The author,  
a young American doctor,  
wishes to remain  
anonymous.*

of a need to apply the Lord's prayer, and release the claim I had on the one who had hurt me.

Walters gives a number of questions to ask oneself when seeking wisdom on the need for forgiveness. I answered affirmatively on nearly all counts.

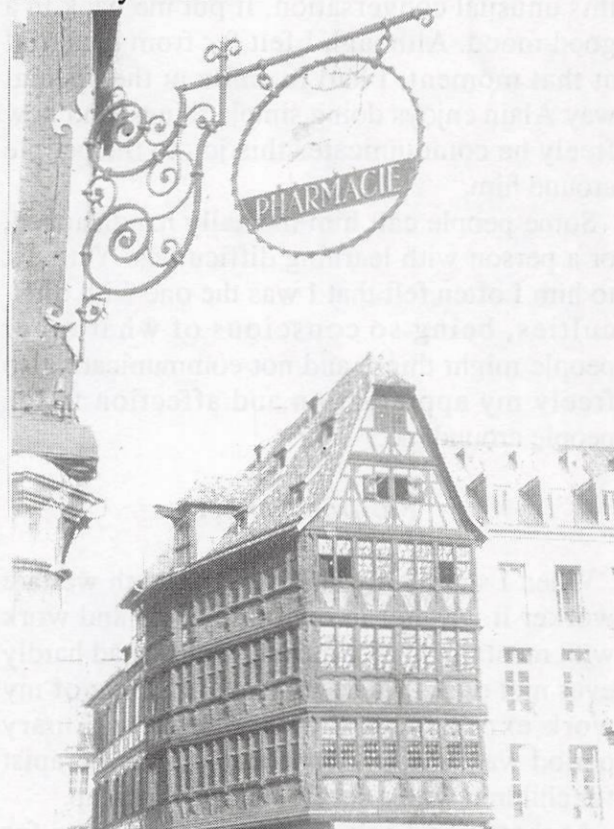
*Do I think about the hurt? Do I have strong feelings of anger? Do I avoid the person, or not communicate? Do I imagine difficulty or injury coming to the person who hurt me? Am I tense or irritable? Do I indirectly or directly attack the other person? Am I highly critical of myself - and discontented with life?*

The next step after realising the need to forgive involves reconciliation, first with God and then with the one who has hurt us. Prayer is an essential component, as it involves turning the will towards obedience. This may involve talking with the other person - or it may not. But there must be a heartfelt desire to release, and ask forgiveness for the anger held against the other.

After this we became more personal because each one of us was asked what we could do, and - if we don't do anything - what are the obstacles that prevent us. One girl explained how she found her inner freedom by confessing

old and secret mistakes, and another shared that for a long time she had limited God's actions because she had always searched for security.

This part of the weekend was very much enriched by the presence of the local Mayor who added in a very humorous way that he himself had often only recognised God's guidance in his life after a long time, so the 'young people' shouldn't be so desperate but trust fully in God.



After a time of prayer and singing we ended by talking about future projects and events. For example, one French student's plan to get in touch with Rumania. Or the opportunity to learn to "Think European" by visiting the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

On the whole this meeting was an inspiration and a challenge to look beyond our borders and to get to know our neighbours better and on a deeper level, something especially we Germans - who are so preoccupied by our own problems these days - shouldn't forget.



# TO BUILD AN

It was a hot afternoon in Paris. The weekly shopping for a household of 8 people needed to be done. I was in a hurry, grumbling at Alain, who came with me. He was not concentrating on what he was doing, happily transforming the tomatoes into tomato sauce by throwing them forcefully into the trolley along with all the tins. The man behind us was also getting impatient. Suddenly Alain smiled at him, wished him a very good day, explained that we were shopping together, concluding with the statement that I was the most beautiful woman in the world. (Alain is always very generous with his compliments.)

The man looked puzzled and embarrassed by this unusual conversation. It put me back in a good mood. Although I felt far from beautiful at that moment, I had to smile at the special way Alain enjoys doing simple things, and how freely he communicates this joy to the people around him.

Some people call him mentally handicapped, or a person with learning difficulties. Yet next to him I often felt that I was the one with difficulties, being so conscious of what other people might think, and not communicating so freely my appreciation and affection to the people around me.

## *Far from perfect*

When I started my studies as a youth welfare worker it was not in my mind to go and work with mentally handicapped people. I had hardly ever met one. It just happened that one of my work experiences during my probationary period was as a kind of occupational therapist for children with a severe mental handicap.

At that time I felt far from perfect and far from God. I was tired of trying to change and then failing again.

It took me a while to feel at home in this work. I was used to organising activities, helping kids to develop their skills. Here I was with people who could do very little and would never make obvious progress. Gradually I felt more and more at ease as I realised that making progress was not really what these people were

asking for. They needed people who would take time to get to know them, who knew how to create an atmosphere in which they could feel secure, who could read their small signs of happiness and sorrow, who could be happy with very small steps forward. In some mysterious way a relationship grew between us, primarily based on being together, and not so much on doing things for each other. It's amazing that love doesn't depend on our doing things well.



It was then that God didn't seem so far away anymore. I began to pray again and to have quiet times in the morning - but concentrating less on all the things I should do, or had done wrong, and more on God's love, his presence, trusting a bit more that he loves me as I am.



During this time I heard a talk by the priest and writer, Henri Nouwen, about l'Arche. These are small ecumenical communities all over the world where people with and without mental handicap live and work together in a simple way. (Unlike institutions where you work for 8hrs a day and then return to your own home.) The assistants have different backgrounds. Some take a year off their studies or work, others commit themselves for a number of years, perhaps a lifetime. Anybody is welcome.

I wrote to a l'Arche community in Paris asking if I could come for a couple of months after my studies. I ended up staying for a year. I stayed in an apartment with seven others - five men with mental handicaps, and two other assistants. It meant sharing life together in so many ways, cooking, cleaning, celebrating and eating. The meals were always important times together. Enough time was taken for them. There were often guests, except for Tuesdays when everybody would stay at home. On that particular night we would share how our week had been and what we had on our minds.

### *I felt inadequate*

I remember being surprised the first Tuesday evening. As a professional I was used to helping others express themselves. Now I was also expected to say how I was feeling. It made the relationships more natural, giving each one the chance to give and to receive. At the end of the evening there was a chance for those who wanted to sing, pray and be silent together.

Although l'Arche is a place where people certainly know how to enjoy life, it is also a place where you are confronted with suffering. You live with people who may feel rejected because they are different, frustrated because they can't do what other people can do, anguished because they are unable to cope in so many situations. Bruno, who dreams of being a doctor, but puts envelopes in boxes day in day out. Patrick, who dreams of impressing women, yet has to accept that girls maybe 20 years younger need to help him with his

money, need to shave him each morning. Gégé, who can only go backwards because of his illness. In so many situations I felt inadequate. Often the only thing you could do was just to be there to listen, not to leave them alone in their distress.

### *Prepare the way*

It is very demanding to live close to all those emotions. In trying to understand, you have to face your own feelings of rejection, frustration and anguish. It also showed me how limited my love can be. Fortunately we were a close team and could share our difficulties and frustrations. We were accompanied by a psychologist who helped us better understand our behaviour. And I needed time with God to recharge me.

Just as when you get to know a friend better, he shares more and more the difficult things you have to carry, the closer I come to God, the more I get the feeling that he wants to share with me his love and concern with people. After a year I had the feeling it was right for me to leave - though I didn't know why because this kind of life answered a need deep inside me. Some months after I had gone I still felt I had left behind me something very precious. I was confused as to whether to return or not. Unfortunately the Netherlands, my home, is one of the few countries where there is no l'Arche. I wrote some of my questions to the founder of l'Arche, Jean Vanier. To my surprise he asked me to prepare the way for a new community in my own country. I accepted. This meant getting together a team, organising a visit from Jean Vanier, giving publicity. At the moment we are trying to get through all the legal and financial stuff. Although it can still take ages before a home will be opened, it's becoming less a dream and more a reality.

Maybe at the beginning I thought that I myself had chosen to go to l'Arche - but the more I get involved the more I have the feeling that I have been chosen and that it's a privilege to be part of it.

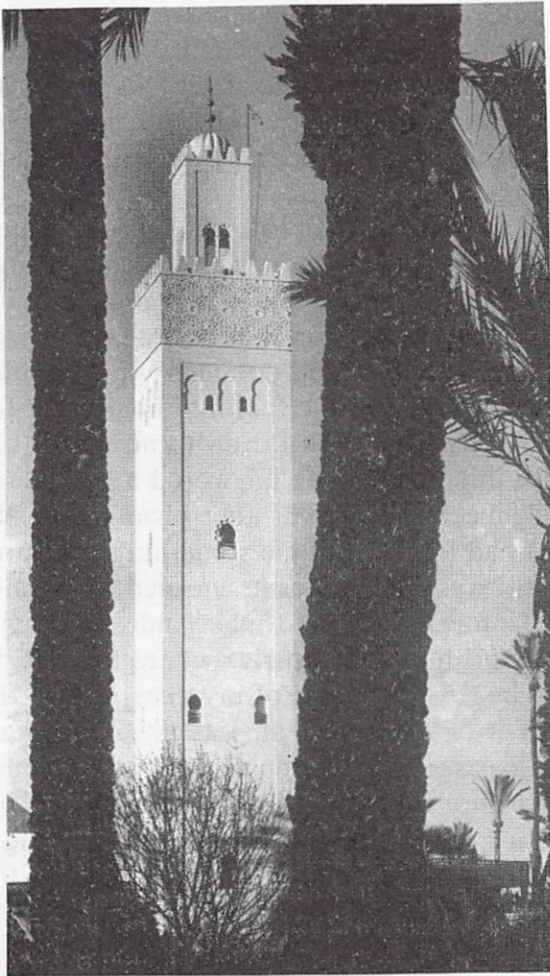


# CHRISTIANITY

by Peter Riddell

A SENIOR LEBANESE diplomat said to me recently, that it was becoming more and more difficult not to analyse the friction - wherever Muslim and Christian communities rub shoulders - in terms of religious conflict. Shortly after the Rushdie affair broke early last year, a Jordanian Ambassador spoke, of having to take steps to avoid the situation deteriorating into 'mediaeval religious war'.

That is what everyone is terrified of. Analyse it in any other terms, ethnic, cultural, social - anything but religious, because once you are forced to a religious interpretation, a series of apparently unrelated conflicts become linked up into a general conflict.



Two recent opinion polls in Britain, suggested that, with the decline of communism, many now see Islam as the greatest threat to their well-being. I imagine that if asked why, they would cite Iran, Gadaffi, hostages in Lebanon, Lockerbie, the Rushdie affair, the issue of Muslim girls wearing head-scarves in

schools in France and now in Britain - all demonstrating hostility towards us in the West.

However I don't believe that we are anywhere near the stage of generalised conflict with the Muslim world yet. But there are warning signs that we may be on a collision course. The controversy caused by 'The Satanic Verses' in this country and the issue of the head scarves in France seem to have focussed the mutual frustrations of both peoples.

Muslim frustrations stem from a historical attempt by the Christian world to dominate them, starting with the crusades. (Western attacks on the Arab world are regularly described as 'Neo-crusades' in Arab newspapers, revealing how present the memory is in people's minds.)

Muslims have a glorious history of which they are justly proud. During what we describe as the 'dark ages', Muslim architects were building magnificent mosques, their scholars developing the sciences of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, that they inherited from the Classical world. For example they introduced to the Roman system the concept of the 'zero', without which, I am told, modern mathematics could not have developed. And when Renaissance Europe found a desire to learn, scholars travelled hundreds of miles to Muslim cities in Spain and (what is now) Iraq to translate and take back this knowledge. So the European civilization owes no mean a debt to the Muslim world.

## *Indignity of colonization*

Since then Muslims have experienced a gradual decline in the league table of world civilizations, to the point of suffering the indignity of being colonized by the Christian European countries. So most of the Muslim countries have had only the last 30 or so years of independence in which to develop their own societies along Islamic lines. And it must be said that their freedom of action has been considerably qualified. Independence found them ill-equipped to compete with the industrialized countries, and during these years both the West and the Eastern blocks have sought to control these countries, politically, economically and militarily.

Being people in whose lives faith plays an all pervading role, they didn't have any real sympathy with the Soviet block and its openly



# AND ISLAM

avowed atheism, and expected it to try and exert control. They had greater expectations of the West, with its democratic traditions and spiritual roots. However, they were disappointed.

They interpreted the decision by the West that the Jews, having been badly treated in Europe, should have a state in the Arab heartland, as a ploy to divide and weaken the Arab and Muslim peoples. Though they could not



have developed their oil production without the help of the Western oil companies, they nevertheless feel that they were unfairly recompensed before OPEC got its act together in 1973. The invasion of Egypt by Britain and France to gain control of the Suez canal in 1956 and the recent American bombing of Libya are but two of numerous military adventures aimed at keeping control of the Islamic countries.

When you begin to look through Muslim eyes at the way Christian countries have behaved towards Muslim countries, you begin to comprehend some of the roots of their frustration towards us. As education spreads in-

creasingly through the Islamic countries, they become more self-confident and less easy to control. That I believe is the origin of our fear. We have treated them badly and are facing the ferocity of their reaction at a time when we are less able to control them.

It would be tragic, not to say dangerous for the world if relations between Muslim and Christian did continue on their present collision course. Both Muslim and Christian claim approximately a billion adherents each, making up between them anything up to 40% of the world's population. Surely the people of these two great faiths, both believing in one God, entrusted, with others, with the stewardship of an increasingly small and threatened planet, could collaborate together on common objectives - even value each other's heritage and contribution? The perspective is important, because it does change our approach; maybe Salman Rushdie would not have written his book, or Penguin not published it, if they had considered these factors.

## *A painful situation*

I recently spent a week in Northern Ireland with a Muslim friend from Lebanon. He responded to an invitation to help with a painful situation that we British have created and now do not know how to resolve. He was gracious enough to free his mind from all that his countrymen are going through, to make whatever contribution he could.

It was for me a model on a micro-scale of how Muslim and Christian might work together. Firstly it involved us Europeans admitting that we don't know, and that we need help. This brings us down from our normal position of dispensing help which puts us in the superior position, to the position of vulnerability, where we are equal with others in need. That builds confidence in itself.

Then secondly, there was the wish to serve each other.

Lastly, and most importantly, we were both committed to the 'practice of obedience'. There were differences in our understanding of how God communicates his will to us, but seeking his will was for both of us the fundamental aim of our lives. And two people who seek guidance from the one God will surely not be led into conflict.



# DINNER IN HEAVEN

## Patrick Turner writes about six people he would like to have dinner with in heaven. (To be continued next issue... )

These articles are clearly based on a number of assumptions, which are worth stating before I begin:

1. That there is a heaven.
2. That, if there is a heaven, it will be possible to recognise people there as the people they were on earth.
3. That the six people in question have gained admission.
4. That the author will himself gain admission.

I have few doubts on the first and second assumptions. The third may be more questionable, but I should be very disappointed if the six people had not 'made it' by one means or another. On the last, I do not offer a view, except to say that I do not subscribe to the 'guaranteed ticket' brand of Christianity, but think that nobody deserves a place, and that we shall all just have to wait and see.

So, to the six characters, in historical order: Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834); Fyodor Mikhail Dostoyevsky (1821-1881); GK (Gilbert Keith) Chesterton (1874-1936); Winston Spencer Churchill (1874-1965); CS (Clive Staples) Lewis (1898-1963), and PG (Pelham Grenville) Wodehouse (1881-1975).

It will be noted that almost all the characters are British - this does not imply, as some have held, that God is an Englishman, but simply reflects the limits of my knowledge and tastes. They are all writers of one sort or another. This reflects the strange fact that it is often those who toil away in study or library who have left the greatest mark on the world.

Most of them (with the probable exceptions of Coleridge and Dostoyevsky) had a well-developed sense of humour. Humour and a sense of our own ridiculousness are two of God's greatest gifts and can often come to our assistance when the sterner virtues cannot. Certainly, God takes many opportunities to remind us of our foolishness and our limitations.

Finally, I think that most, if not all of them, illustrate to a greater or lesser extent how God can use people who have not necessarily entirely given their lives to Him. This first article explains why I have chosen Coleridge, Chesterton and Churchill.

### Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Coleridge was an extraordinary genius. A brilliant journalist, he was offered (and turned down) an editorial job on the *Morning Post* at a salary of \$2,000 a year, before he was 30. He wrote *Kubla Khan* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* - two of the greatest poems in the English language when he was only 25.

His poems offer some of the best insights into inspiration, the spiritual battle within men and the uncontrollable power, majesty and mystery of nature. At the end of *Kubla Khan* he gives an extraordinary portrayal of artistic inspiration:

*And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of paradise.*

He saw nature as having a spiritual quality. Thus, in the *Ancient Mariner*, the battle for the soul of the mariner is fought out in terms of his responses to nature. The sin that he commits is to shoot an albatross:

*At length did cross an Albatross,  
Through the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.*

*God save thee, Ancient Mariner!  
From the fiends that plague thee thus! -  
Why look'st thou so - With my crossbow  
I shot the Albatross.*

After a long period in a natural and spiritual 'wilderness', he is redeemed when he rediscovers a love of creation, in the form of many-coloured water-snakes. He exclaims:

*O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware.*

*The selfsame moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea.*





## Winston Churchill

If accounts are anything to go by, dinner with Churchill would often have involved very little speaking by anyone but Churchill. Lady Longford wrote of him that 'his set-pieces were. . . so brilliant that few listeners wished to interrupt. Similarly, they recognised that he was self-centred precisely because he had an interior vision which must be brought to the light of day'. Despite this and numerous other failings, I choose him because of his magnificent breadth of vision and statesmanship, but also because of his wonderful use of the English language and his (sometimes biting) sense of humour. One of his favourite sayings about himself was: 'in the course of my life I have often had to eat my words, and I must confess that I have always found it a most wholesome diet'.

He was not particularly a man of religious belief (although he told the United States Congress in 1942 that 'He must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see some great design and purpose is being worked out here below, of which we have the honour to be the faithful servants'). However, in the Second World War, he was supremely the man to meet the hour and I believe that God had prepared him to play the central role which he did in saving Western civilisation. He became Prime Minister at the age of 65, in May 1940, in the middle of what was perhaps the greatest crisis of the war. Part of his greatness as a leader was that he was a man of deep emotions, which he expressed openly - he was readily moved to tears, and he had no compunction about weeping openly in public. He used his emotion and his superb ability with both the written and the spoken word to rouse a nation whose spirit had been sapped by the lies and self-delusion of his predecessor Neville Chamberlain. His speech to the House of Commons three days after becoming Prime Minister is one of the great passages in the English language:

*I would say to the House, as I have said to those who have joined this Government:  
"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." . . .*

*You ask, what is our policy?  
I will say: it is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength God can give us. . .*

*You ask, what is our aim?  
I can answer in one word: it is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival.'*

## G K Chesterton

Chesterton combined a profound intellect, a wonderfully clear and thought-provoking writing style, faith and humour in a rare degree. As well as being a great cartoonist, he is best known for his 'Father Brown' stories about a rather shabbily dressed, unassuming Catholic priest who uses his great experience of human nature to solve crimes. The priest is almost certainly modelled in part on the man who converted Chesterton to Catholicism, Father O'Connor, although he is also based on Chesterton himself. Chesterton regarded the 'Father Brown' stories as his least important works, and the book generally considered to be his masterpiece is *The Everlasting Man*, designed to defend the idea that man is a special creation of God. In this book, Chesterton writes about the paradox of God assuming human form in the person of Jesus, and its impact on literature: 'that the hands that had made the sun and stars were too small to reach the huge heads of the cattle. Upon this paradox, we might almost say upon this jest, all the literature of our faith is founded'.

Chesterton finally converted to Catholicism quite late in his life, and wrote a wonderful sonnet on the day of his acceptance into the Catholic church:

*After one moment when I bowed my head  
And the whole world turned over and came upright,  
And I came out where the old road shows white,  
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,  
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,  
Being not unlovable but strange and light;  
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite  
But softly, as men smile about the dead.*

*The sages have a hundred maps to give  
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,  
They rattle reason out through many a sieve  
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:  
And all these things are less than dust to me  
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.*



# NORWAY'S TRUE REVOLUTIONARY

## THE STORY OF MRA - 18 by Rex Dilly

WHEN FRANK BJERKHOLT, the Norwegian journalist, went to Moscow recently he was listened to with unusual interest by people there. He spoke of his father Hans, who had met Stalin in Moscow in the 1930s, and was honorary colonel in the Red Army and co-founder of the Norwegian Communist Party.

Frank told the remarkable story of his relationship with his father. 'Politically,' he said, 'we were at loggerheads and I felt estranged from him. My mother was a pious Christian and I found myself living in something like an East-West conflict, under "ideological gunfire" from both sides. As she was stronger I became a Christian and started to study theology.'

Following this experience Frank asked himself how he could build a relationship with his father? He decided he must try to be a good son to him. 'I told him honestly the truth about myself, and began discussing all kinds of issues with him. As we talked openly with each other we became friends. Then one day my father realised that there were things in his own life that were not right. When he decided to get straight himself and put right what had been morally wrong he experienced something important. Suddenly he realised what was wrong with Leninism.'

It was at Caux that Hans Bjerkholt discovered the fuller dimension of the change that was coming into his life. He saw the society he had always dreamed of.

Visiting Caux in 1950 he was overwhelmed by the friendship shown him. Speaking publicly he said, 'My first thanks should go to my own son and to his closest friends'. He told of his struggles in the labour movement where he had fought on the extreme left since the age of sixteen. He spoke of reading *The Communist Manifesto* with his brother and being captured by the hope of a new world. He told of having been in a Nazi concentration camp for over three years in the Second World War.

'We are living in a period of development when men are prepared to change. The future of mankind depends on how far we are prepared to change personally, myself included, so that we can create the basis on which we can work together. We talk about revolution, about new systems. But the real revolution which begins with the change of the individual - that is the revolution of our time.'

He had encountered Moral Re-Armament as a fighting Communist, but as a revolutionary he was seeking the truth. For two years he had

studied MRA. 'I brought against it every quotation I could think of from Marx and Engels. When I finished my study I found in MRA the society and way of life which was exactly what I had been fighting for during all my years of Communism.'

'The hallmark of a true revolutionary,' he would say, 'is that he always seeks to re-orientate himself in reality.'

'As I walked this road of self-knowledge through events and experiences in my life I became tied to a new reality - which I discovered was God. This process of ethical cleansing releases the most progressive elements in each individual and places him in a constructive plan for remaking the world.'

Pondering this new role he asked himself the questions which he knew to be on the agenda of the Communist Party in Moscow but had never been answered, 'How do you create the new type of man who is able to master the material needs of mankind? How do you create the quality of life that has the answer to selfishness and therefore makes it possible for every man to give according to his capacity and receive according to his need?'

### *No hate for anyone*

At Caux Hans Bjerkholt met people from many nations. 'They have begun to listen to their conscience and obey its voice as I have begun to do. If we follow this voice and obey it, then we will begin to move forward in the right way. Absolute moral standards are the signpost for action. I must begin with myself. I have made a beginning and come to some results already. No difficulties can prevent me from doing what is right. I have no hate for anyone. I will give my hand to anyone who will fight unselfishly for a new world.'

He had high hopes that he could bring the Norwegian Communist Party with him in this new thinking. On his return the Central Committee of the Party called him to a conference where he gave his deepest convictions from his experience in Caux. He also put it in writing. There was no reply. On January 21st, 1951, he wrote a letter resigning from the Party in which he concluded, 'It is my hope that in our country, many communists, socialists, progressive and unprejudiced people generally will turn out pioneers in the fight for this new thinking on which mankind and our common future depends.'



# HOW CAN A POET WIN A WAR?

by Mark Boobbyer

"The poet should not talk about immorality, not put it on stage for everyone to copy. Schoolboys have a master to teach them, grown-ups have the poets. We have a duty to see that what we teach them is right and proper."

So says Aeschylus to Euripides in *The Frogs*, a comedy written by Aristophanes of Athens, and first produced in 400 BC. His message is similar to that of Solzhenitsyn in our own day. Aeschylus was the great dramatist and poet of the years of the Athenian Empire. His style was grand and pompous, his material upright and true. But in 405 BC, two generations later, Athens was in decline and about to lose the war against Sparta. Euripides was the poet of this age: skillful, witty, fast-moving and licentious.

*The Frogs* features a competition which takes place in the underworld between these two dramatists to determine which is the better poet. The winner will return to Athens to save the city. But how can a poet win a war?

For Aristophanes, these poets were not the products of different eras, but the chief protagonists in the creation of their societies. Nowadays, it may be the pop stars, film stars or sportsmen, rather than politicians, who are most influential in creating public morality, but in Aristophanes' day it was the poet. It was the poet's responsibility to speak the truth. To portray immorality on stage was to encourage the incidence of it in private life. To portray heroism and stoicism was to raise the morale and morality of the people. Hence to save the city it was necessary to bring the best possible poet back from the dead.



Aeschylus wins, the judge determining that his higher standards of morality would be able to save the city. In reality, the city was not saved, the war lost by an immoral and soft generation.

Aristophanes attacks immorality in public

and private life. Unfortunately, he himself seems to live by a different rule book. His plays are as cruel as they could be, he relies on filth and innuendo for cheap laughs, and he cruelly derides the politicians whom he views as at fault. He seems to have an enigmatic character, breathing hot and cold with the same breath. Or perhaps like many others he exhorted his contemporaries to a higher morality, but was not prepared to count the cost in his own life. Move over Aristophanes.

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## Water from a deep well

*O Lord, remember not only the man, woman of good-will but also those of ill-will.*

*But do not remember all the sufferings they have inflicted on us. Remember only the fruits we have borne, thanks to these sufferings: of our comradeship, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of these sufferings. And when they come to judgment, let all these fruits which we have borne, 'Be their forgiveness.'*

(Anonymous Prayer)

*Lord, give us power to conquer temptation as thou didst in the wilderness.*

*The very first step towards conquering temptation is to see it as temptation. To dissociate yourself from it.*

*Not to think of it as something resulting from your tiredness, or illness, or poverty, or nerve-strain, when you feel you might well excuse yourself for yielding but to realise that when you have heard my 'voice' (the Heavens opened as it were) and are going to fulfil your mission to work for me and to draw souls to me, you must expect a mighty onslaught from the evil one, who will endeavour with all his might to frustrate you, and prevent your good work.*

*Expect that.*

*Then when these little temptations or big ones, come, you will recognize them as planned by evil to thwart me.*

*Then for very love of me, you will conquer.*

(From "God's Calling")



'I WISH I knew who I am. Every time I see a fashion article featuring elegant, tailored dressing, I think "That's me". Every time I see those loose, unstructured Italian clothes, I think "That's me". Every time I see bright, colourful sweaters and jeans, I think, "That's me". Who am I? In fact, nothing like any of these.'



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