



Blessed Be

September 2016

Welcome back to the Grail's spirituality publication. The items in it have been contributed by various people and reflect the Grail's Christian foundation as well as its openness to the spirituality and ideas of other faith traditions. We will be publishing another edition around December and, if you have anything that you wish to contribute, we would welcome your input, so please contact us at helenlmacauley@gmail.com.

And so we come to Spring once more. and are focussing in this issue on the world of Nature. To start we have some pieces from Fran Warner:

I thank you God for this most amazing day:
For the leaping greenly spirits of trees
And a blue true dream of sky;
And for everything
Which is natural which is infinite
Which is yes.
(E E Cummings)

“To trace the history of a river or a raindrop, as John Muir would have done, is also to trace the history of the soul, the history of the mind descending and arising in the body. In both, we constantly seek and stumble on divinity...”

(Gretel Erlich, quoted in Richard Louw, 'Last Child in the Woods: saving our children from nature-deficit disorder', Atlantic Books, New York, 2005, p.291.)

‘We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget, that the birds which are idly singing around us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life; or we forget how largely these songsters, or their eggs, or their nestlings, are destroyed by birds and beasts of prey; we do not always bear in mind that though food may be now superabundant, it is not so at all seasons of each recurring year’.

(From C. Darwin 'On the origin of species', quoted in Elizabeth Johnson, 'Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love', 2014, Bloomsbury, London, p. 52.)

Tricia Gemmel wrote the following reflection for Easter, but lack of space prevented its publication then. As Easter occurs in spring in the northern hemisphere, I thought it might work well for our spring edition....

Some of us at the Sydney Grail have been reading and discussing Elizabeth Johnson's *Ask the Beasts*. In this book she talks about 'deep incarnation' and 'deep resurrection' – something worth reflecting on.

The Incarnation, she says, takes on new meaning in an evolutionary context. 'The Word became flesh', we read in the Gospel of John.. But human flesh, we know, is not only human flesh.

'Scientific knowledge today is repositioning the human species as an intrinsic part of the evolutionary network of life on our planet, which in turn is a part of the solar system, which itself came into being as a later chapter of cosmic history. The landscape of our imagination expands when we realize that human connection to nature is so deep that we can no longer completely define human identity without including the great sweep of cosmic development and our shared biological ancestry with all organisms in the community of life. We evolved relationally; we exist symbiotically; our existence depends on interaction with the rest of the natural world. Relocating anthropology in this broader context provides the condition to rethink the scope and significance of the incarnation in an ecological direction. The flesh that the Word of God became as a human being is part of the vast body of the cosmos...The flesh assumed in Jesus Christ connects with all humanity, all biological life, all soil, the whole matrix of the material universe down to its very roots '

What Scripture has long intimated, science now confirms: 'the incarnation is a cosmic event' What does this 'deep incarnation' add to whatever previous understandings we may have had about the incarnation? Does it not first of all make us look on the earth and the cosmos of which it is a part with different eyes, knowing that Jesus immersed himself into its evolutionary history? And if we claim as Christians to want to grow into the likeness of God, what does it mean for us when Johnson says that 'Calvary graphically illuminates the insight that the God of love whose presence continuously sustains and empowers the origin of species is a God of suffering love in solidarity with all creatures living and dying through endless millennia of evolution'. Does the suffering of animals really matter?

Johnson quotes this beautiful paragraph from Arlen Gray, who wrote a meditation on Jesus' words on the cross:

'I suddenly understood that in his final death scry Jesus gathered up all of the earth's suffering throughout all time, bound it up and presented it before the heavenly throne, not in reams of words but in a sacred package encompassing the sorrows, the sufferings, the lost dreams of all creation, all peoples, all times, all conditions, and carried it directly to the pulsing, loving heart of the living Trinity, where it is now. Jesus screams and he, full of grace and truth, thereby took his and all anguish and transfigured it into a means of touching God.'

And finally, 'deep incarnation' means 'deep resurrection'. Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead portends the resurrection --whatever that might mean (and we cannot begin to imagine it) – of the whole creation.

Scientists tell us that this world, indeed the whole universe, will one day come to an end. The sun has enough fuel for another 5 billion years and then it will die. In the face of these calculations, theology dares to say differently. Theology dares to say that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The evidence for such belief is the lived experience of a God who is always faithful. Remember the rainbow covenant made with Noah and his descendants and every living creature with him, a promise made by God with absolutely no conditions. The early Christians certainly believed in redemption for the whole created order: look at Paul in Romans 8:18-25 in which he foresees a time when creation will be set free from its bondage to decay, or the great hymn in Colossians 1:15-20, in which God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether in heaven or on earth. Read the letter to the Ephesians 1:10, or God's promise in Revelation: 2.15, 'See, I am making all things new'. The whole universe may hope for a future in God.

Thanks to Sheila Hawthorn:

PSALM TO VIRGIN SPRING

Drawn upward by some hidden power,
bursting forth from limb and stem.
Your aroma, O Life-giver.

Green is your colour, O God,
the green of new life
that lovingly transfigures earth's dreariness,
long held prisoner by the icy web of winter's cold.

Green up my heart with hope,
in your perpetual promise of life.
Send forth from my soul
new shoots, fresh buds
eager to grow in your divine image.

May this year's visit of virgin Spring
make my heart a virgin once again
intoxicated with wild love for you,
whom I discover in all things
and in everyone.

(From Edward Hayes, 'Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim')

Some pieces that I, Helen MacAuley, came across recently:

When I admire the wonder of a sunset or the beauty of the moon, my soul expands in worship of the Creator. I try to see Him and His mercies in all these creations. But even the sunsets and sunrises would be mere hindrances, if they did not help me to think of Him. Anything which is a hindrance to the flight of the soul is a delusion and a snare; even, like the body, which does hinder you in the path of salvation.

(Mohandas K. Gandhi, Young India, 13-11-1924)

For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore, they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect.

(Mohandas K. Gandhi, Harijan 30-1-1937)

Walk and touch happiness every moment.
Each step brings a fresh breeze.
Each step makes a flower bloom under our feet.
Kiss the earth with your feet.
Print on earth your love and happiness.

(Thich Nhat Hanh, cited in 'Heaven on Earth').

I am the divine seed within all beings...
Nothing and no one could exist without me.
 Whatever in this world is fine,
 whatever radiates intelligence or beauty,
 know that it pulses with
 my unlimited radiance.
With a mere fragment of myself,
I permeate and support the entire universe.

(Bhagavad Gita 10:39, 41-42)

From Alison Healey:

God used to say: Happiness is like water running through our fingers.
When you want to grasp it, it is no more there.
When you want to own it, it vanishes.
We do not own things: we keep them for a while in our hands.
Once you want to win them, they own us.
When we try to appropriate them, we lose them.
When we let them go, we master them.
If you want to be happy, do not become attached to things. Then you will own them

(From the wisdom of India, source unknown)

That the birds of worry and care fly over your head – this you cannot change;
but that they build nests in your hair – this you can prevent.

(Chinese proverb)

AS TORRENTS IN SUMMER

As torrents in summer, half dried in their channels,
 Suddenly rise, tho' the sky is still cloudless,
For rain has been falling far off at their fountains;
So hearts that are fainting grow full to o'erflowing
 And they that behold it marvel, yet know not
That God in their fountains far off has been raining.

(Henry Longfellow)

THANK YOU to Marian Kelly for her artistic input into the design and layout,
to Alison Healey and Anne Day, the other members of the production team,
to the contributors to each issue without whom there would be no publication,
and to you readers who have responded so positively.

