

The Soul's Eye — *Wolfgang Somary*

My fathers' faith
I have betrayed with filial love
and only strangers answer
when I greet:
we raise our hands
like camel drivers to the sun,
shuffling through silt of yore
with silent feet.

The prophets' sculptured words
were chiseled in the night
on Bethel's rock
and breathed upon the Nile;
but now our golden temple's
covered up with sand
and all that's left to see
is half a broken tile.

You, sister, take a left
and, brother, go to right:
search for a wind,
a willow and a well*:
look for a shepherd child
with eyes that melt the moon,
who walks the shifting dunes
without a fear of hell.

* Wind — the Holy Spirit that blew on Elias,
Willow, where the Hebrews hung their harps
on the river in Babylon, the Well, where Jesus
sat when speaking to the woman of Samaria.

Someone complained to me that we have lost our faith and that everything has become relative. No, I replied: we have shed our devotional habits with their corset of apologetics, fear of eternal hellfire and hope of paradise, search for identity, maintenance of barriers, historisation of myth, submission as price for salvation, demonization of lust, toleration of cruelty, and a dualistic worldview instead of an acceptance of polarity.

How did that come about? Through those diabolical genocides of the 20th Century, that resulted in justified disobedience and detachment of personal conscience from institutional authority, through easy access to vast information, through our recognition of shadow and subconscious as psychic realities, through our acknowledgement of the limits of a rational free will, through our ever increasing exposure to people of other persuasions and through our awareness of the contingency of cultures and beliefs according to time, space and language.

Old time religion, a compendium of canonical laws, customs and revelations, in sacrosanct institutional wrappings, is a good anchor and an excellent harbor; but the mariner's task is to sail. The Holy Spirit cannot be institutionalized; Christianity gives way to Christlikeness and, though there may still be millions who believe the world was created end of April or in October 4004 B.C., while some neurologists and bio-genetical engineers locate God in serotonin, a secretion of the brain, or in an optional gene, I would not give much stock to what one claims to believe but mainly to how one behaves.

Seeing your eyes
glow serenely
as you lift me to light,
and feeling your hand
smiling away my pain,
I believe every word
you whisper of Jesus,
in spite of tethered
fishlines of faith
hooking my ear
on an anchor
to hinder my sailing.

Hearing you sing
Allaha's praise,
your blinding eyes
reddened by alleyway dust,
I feel your telling
of Mohammed's ride
to Elysium and back
under Gabriel's wings
and hang my ears
on the treble clef
of your ululation.

Finding you dance
the morning star into dawn
on hills of Silòah —
your shoulders quivering
in jasmine breath
of vibrant seraphs,
I know you are Ruth
greening the land of Jacob
with the touch of your feet.

Will grace still be routed
in narrow embankments,
choking in silt?
Water's for kissing
from spouting wells
in the desert of Moab —
no cup but your hands
for crystal communion.

My lord is your breath ,
no convict of writ,
the flame of your love,
no law on a rock,
the Christ in your heart,
no judge on a throne,
a whispering wind,
underway and alone.

When I was young, my mother once engaged a dark-skinned Baptist cook. Whenever I entered the kitchen, I noticed the peaceful expression on her face. At the end of the third week she gave notice. When my mother asked for the reason, she serenely replied: “Mammy, I can’t work for people who go to church on Sunday, then come home and fight”. That episode stuck in my memory.

Witnesses of light are engraved in my heart, witnesses of darkness engraved in my groin, both with permanence. At the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, a poor Chassid in a tattered white cloak (black suits are the conventional attire) sat on a bench, trying to instruct young lads. His red-rimmed eyes seemed to search for human connection and I instinctively felt he was an outcast among his own people. I accosted him and, though we had no common tongue, saw in his face the prophet Jeremiah, come to mourn the new captivity in Babylon. Before the Omar Mosque in Damascus, a young cleric touched my arm and asked me to return the next morning because now he must close the mosque for the night. We looked into each other’s eyes and that look became a prayer. Squatting on a wall in New Delhi, I was engrossed in writing an essay, when a sannyasin in a flaming orange and white robe stopped in front of me. I looked up, saw him making the gesture of writing, tried in vain to tell him what I wrote, saw him gesture again to continue writing and suddenly felt what I had planned to write but did not yet know how to express flow through my hand. In Sarnath near Benares a bhakti whose skin reflected the sun beckoned me into a villa that was falling to ruin. With a brotherly arm around my shoulder, he walked with me in a trance several times around the statue of Hanuman, the Monkey God of Hindu lore, his love rinsing me from the wrath of my cultural ancestors. A blind Irish lady, who went to Lourdes to pray for her ill friends, visited us on her way home. She could then see us clearly, though the best

doctors had given her no hope, and serenely accepted that her momentarily restored sight would be lost again. Such witnesses and many others sit in my soul's eye and memory.

Somber images or tones also beg for remembrance. In the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, while singing *Vexilla regis prodeunt* ("The standards of the King go forth before us"), a throng of Roman Catholic priests marched through the Greek Orthodox section, inviting conflict through their triumphant show of presence, and a portly Franciscan priest, determined to celebrate Mass right after the skinny Coptic priest began his, maliciously drowned him out with his booming voice, though he could easily have altered his timetable. In Old Delhi a procession of Hindus with Shivite markings on their foreheads, their leaders sitting on elephants, rode through the main street, exuding anger and self-righteousness. This anger was ultimately channelled into the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, which in turn was built on a destroyed Hindu temple of Ram.

Coin me no code between your God and me,
whom I adore without your lashing flames,
upon whose breath I hang with no ones meddling faith —
no frown of righteousness or folding hands;
mind, I dislike the title *Lord* when breathing Adonai.
I may dance nude for Elohim at night,
and kneel as much or little as I raise my hands
to hail the rising sun.
And if you ask me where I read what I believe,
I'll say I give no great importance to that *me*
questioned to label faith
but hover like a moth around a christ-all light
that burns like pistils in a lily.

Don't moor me with your anchoring,
silted with savor past.
Between my *stella maris* and your battering ram
well pools of vinegar from gritted teeth.
Harsh consonants will mar your speech

when vowels are for bridging:
your desert gutturals cut flows of light
that shift from *tell* to *wadi*;
Your hammering and nailing seal the dusk
during an abstinence of greening;
sycophant shades dance meekly
around an aging idol
while Vishnu walks on winds.

I'd neither have you spit into your mother's bowl
nor turn my cup aside
while measuring God with letters sliced,
sawed out of season.
Compassion's tidings crumble your *feste Burg*,
mortared with fear.
You cast my vision of salvation into rubbish bins,
cleared between rinsing of hands.
When will you quell your anger
in cataracts of mothers tears,
abandon smug companionships of wrath,
daring to smile a stranger into strength
without your leader's backing?

Attending Sunday service a few years ago in a small church in Wales, I heard my oldest friend in time preach a sermon that came straight from the heart, He quoted St. Theresa of Avila, saying:

Christ has no body now on earth but ours,
no hands but ours, no feet but ours.
Ours are the eyes
through which is to look out
Christ's compassion to the world.
Ours are the feet
with which He is to go about doing good.
Ours are the hands
through which he is to bless men now.

Some may deny that these words were spoken by Theresa of Avila, others may attribute them to Mother Theresa of Calcutta, and some may even think they are blasphemous. Then, renewing our confrontational course and, instead of listening to Thomas à Kempis, who wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*: “Ask *what* has been said, and not *who* said it”, we may ride once more over dead bodies in order to prove ourselves in the right or else chew these words as the Prophet Ezekiel chewed the scroll of words he was given to proclaim.

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